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Ethnic disparities and apprenticeship participation

Qualitative research findings

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Over the past decade, significant reforms have been introduced to the apprenticeship system in England, including the Apprenticeship Levy and changes to qualification standards and training requirements. Existing research has identified several barriers faced by all young people in accessing apprenticeships, including low awareness, low wages, and entry-level requirements that hinder access for disadvantaged groups. However, there has been limited research on the under-representation of minority ethnic young people in apprenticeships.

In response, Youth Futures Foundation (Youth Futures) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to conduct qualitative research into the participation of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in apprenticeships. The study complements forthcoming data analysis by Youth Futures and sought to understand which factors may be contributing to ethnic disparities in apprenticeship starts, completions and achievements.

The study used a qualitative research design to explore the experience of minority ethnic apprentices. It included six interviews with stakeholders such as academic experts, representatives from voluntary community sector (VCS) organisations, and employer/training provider bodies. Additionally, our case study research involved interviews and focus groups with five employers, four training providers, and 20 minority ethnic young people who had experience with apprenticeships. The case studies took place in London, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber.

Findings

The research identified several key barriers to participation and completion for minority ethnic young people in apprenticeships:

- **Awareness and Perceptions**: Parents and family networks were reported to play a crucial role in steering young people toward

academic pathways rather than apprenticeships. This was felt to result from a perceived lack of awareness and understanding about apprenticeships amongst minority ethnic communities. One reason for this was limited information about the benefits of and progression routes within apprenticeships; another was a preference or aspiration among parents for their children to complete a university degree. Additionally, minority ethnic young people faced challenges in accessing information about the availability and requirements of apprenticeships. Young people cited personal contacts, teachers, school careers advisers and social media (particularly TikTok) as important sources of information that facilitate apprenticeship applications and starts.

- **Financial Barriers**: Low wages within apprenticeships can be a significant deterrent, particularly for those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Young people discussed how on the one hand, the fact that you get a wage and do not incur any student debt is an incentive for choosing an apprenticeship over a university degree. On the other hand, the low pay often creates financial strain, which can impact both initial interest and the ability to complete apprenticeship programmes. Young people described an expectation to contribute to household income in their families, which they said may not exist among their white peers. Low wages in apprenticeships can lead to the expectation or necessity of taking on additional jobs, which can deter applications and result in lower completion and achievement rates.

- **Inclusion and Experiences of Racism**: Our interviewees reported that some employers lack cultural awareness, leading to feelings of alienation and discrimination among apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds. Employers, training providers and young people also highlighted instances of racism, both overt and systemic. Additionally, young people reported how past experiences of discrimination and racism might deter those from minority ethnic backgrounds from pursuing apprenticeships, especially in sectors perceived to lack diversity. Lastly, the lack of minority ethnic role models within

apprenticeship programmes and employing organisations was seen as a demotivating factor. These factors may be contributing to lower completion and achievement rates among minority ethnic young people.

- **Regional and Sectoral Variations**: Our research highlighted that the availability and accessibility of apprenticeships varied significantly across regions and sectors. In London, low pay in a city with a high cost of living was a pronounced barrier. In Yorkshire and the Humber, lack of public transport infrastructure outside the major towns and cities was seen as a deterrent for socio-economically disadvantaged young people. Low growth and a predominance of smaller companies were also cited as reasons for there being fewer apprenticeship opportunities in this region. In the West Midlands, participants described a good availability of apprenticeship opportunities and a particularly strong careers provision in schools. In the Health, Public Services and Care sector, participants believed that negative perceptions of progression routes within the sector contribute to lower start rates. In the Business, Administration and Law sector, on the other hand, participants perceived progression routes to be good but highlighted the lack of visibility of minority ethnic leaders and role models as potential deterrents.

About the Authors

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is the UK's largest, independent, not-for-profit social research agency. We believe that social research has the power to make life better. By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Over the past decade significant reforms have been introduced to the apprenticeship system in England. This has included the introduction of professional qualification-aligned standards and minimum apprenticeship durations as well as mandatory requirements for off-the-job training and Level 2 English and Maths qualifications.[1] The Apprenticeship Levy was also introduced, requiring large employers (those with an annual pay bill of over £3 million) to contribute 0.5% of their annual payroll costs to fund apprenticeship training, with the aim of increasing investment in skills development and workforce training.

Within the context of these reforms, data has shown an overall decline in the total number of apprenticeships available in England over the last five years.[2] This decline has largely comprised a drop in the availability of vacancies in intermediate and advanced-level apprenticeships in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), disproportionately impacting younger people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.[3] This decline was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the number of apprenticeships starts reducing by 45% between March to July 2019 compared to the same period in 2020.[4] These declines in apprenticeships starts were particularly concentrated among SMEs and specific sectors, and among those aged under 25.[5] Post-COVID-19 lockdowns, the number of apprenticeships starts began to increase. This has however varied between sectors, with uncertainty as to whether growth will be sustained.

Against this backdrop, research with employers, training providers and apprentices has identified several barriers young people face in accessing apprenticeships. This includes low awareness and a poor image of apprenticeships, low wages, and entry-level requirements limiting access among disadvantaged groups.[6] The evidence that explores barriers to apprenticeships is, however, limited, often homogenising the experiences of

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[1] During National Apprenticeship Week 2025, the government has announced the relaxation of Maths and English exit requirements for learners aged 19 and above 10,000 more apprentices as government slashes red tape to boost growth - GOV.UK

[2] Powell, A. 2024. Apprenticeships statistics for England. [online] Available at: Apprenticeships policy in England - House of Commons Library

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Straw, S. et al. 2022. *Equalising access to apprenticeships*. [online] NFER: Available at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/equalising-access-to-apprenticeships/

those from marginalised and minoritised groups.[7] This is particularly the case for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds: studies identify an under-representation among apprenticeship participants of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, but a lack of specific research means that the drivers of these disparities are unclear.[8]

The current evidence base tentatively suggests a range of factors that may contribute to ethnic disparities in apprenticeships in England. Evidence from surveys and data on apprenticeship applications by ethnicity shows that there is a potential mismatch between interest in and apprenticeship starts among all young people, but particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Coupled with this, there is a lack of apprenticeship opportunities in some sectors and in geographical regions with higher concentrations of minority ethnic populations, notably London.[9] Some qualitative research also suggests minority ethnic young people are more likely to aspire to and are encouraged toward other forms of higher education, and discouraged from vocational and technical pathways, including apprenticeships.[10] [11] Further research also suggests young people from minority ethnic communities receive a lack of formal support in navigating further and higher education. This is exacerbated by social capital and financial barriers in the labour market that intersect with disadvantages related to social class.[12] Research suggests that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to have access to careers guidance

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[7] Chadderton, C., and Wischmann, A., 2014. Racialised norms in apprenticeship systems in England and Germany. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, [e-journal] 66(3), 330–347. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2014.917693.

[8] Clark, K. and Nolan, S., 2021. *COVID-19 and apprenticeship policy for minority ethnic young people*. Manchester: Runnymede Trust

[9] Mackie, L., 2021. *Minority ethnic Young People and Apprenticeships in England.* [pdf] London: Black Training Enterprise Group. Available at: https://www.actionforraceequality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/BTEG-BRIEFING-ETHNIC-MINORITY-YOUNG-PEOPLE-AND-APPRENTICESHIPS-IN-ENGLAND-JULY-2021.pdf

[10] Ryan, L., and Lőrinc, M., 2018. Perceptions, prejudices and possibilities: young people narrating apprenticeship experiences. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, [e-journal] 39(6), 762–777. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1417821

[11] Lernelius, L., 2018. *Apprenticeships and diversity in context in Greater Manchester*. [pdf] Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Available at: https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1921/removing-barriers-for-bame-people-accessing-apprenticeships.pdf

[12] Iyer et al 2021. Understanding young people's experiences of higher education: Qualitative consultations with working-class Black, South Asian and white young people in England. London: National Centre for Social Research.

and networks which could provide insights into a range of career options, including apprenticeships.[13]

Within this context, Youth Futures Foundation (Youth Futures) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to conduct qualitative research to explore the participation of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in apprenticeships and potential drivers of disparities. The findings of this research will contribute to wider knowledge and analysis on ethnic disparities in apprenticeships across England, to inform Youth Futures' subsequent research and policy response.

This research also involves quantitative data analysis, which Youth Futures are conducting in-house. Findings from the quantitative analysis will be published separately, and we will also reference the data throughout this report.

Ethnic disparities in apprenticeship start rates

In the 2023/24 academic year, 736,500 people participated in an apprenticeship in England. [14] In 2023/24, approximately 52% of starters were under the age of 25, positioning apprenticeships as a substantial form of further education and skills training for young people.[15]

Analysis conducted by Youth Futures shows that apprenticeship start rates (per 1,000 individuals) are substantially higher for young people from white ethnic backgrounds than for those from minority ethnic backgrounds.[16] In the 2022/23 academic year, the start rate per 1,000 young people aged 16-24 was 31.8 for white young people, compared to just 16.8 for those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Among the ethnic groups who are a focus of our research (Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), start rates are substantially lower than their white peers. This was 22.6 for Pakistani young people, 17.3 for Bangladeshi young people, and 12.8 for Black young people. Start rates have

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[13] Holt-White, E., Montacute, R., & Tibbs, L., 2022. Paving the Way: Careers guidance in secondary schools. The Sutton Trust. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/paving-the-way/

[14] Murray, A. (2025) Apprenticeship statistics [Online]. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06113/SN06113.pdf

[15] Ibid.

[16] Youth Futures Foundation analysis of DfE data (unpublished). To enable meaningful comparison of apprenticeship starts between ethnic groups, start rates were calculated per 1,000 individuals using the Annual Population Survey (APS) population estimates for people aged 16-24, part of the published estimates for all people in the working-age population (16-64) in England (Jan-Dec 2023). Start rates per 1,000 were calculated by dividing the number of apprenticeship starts for a given ethnic group in a region by the corresponding population size for that ethnic group in the region, and then multiplying the result by 1,000 to express the rate per 1,000 individuals.

declined since 2014/15 for all of these groups except for Pakistani young people, where there has been some growth in start rates in recent years.

Ethnic disparities in apprenticeship starts are evident across most regions. When looking at start rates per 10,000 individuals (calculated using ONS 2023 mid-year estimates for 16-64-year-olds in England), we see that white individuals still have the highest start rates in most regions, except for London, the South East and the South West. Black apprentices have the highest start rates per 10,000 in these three regions.

Ethnic disparities in apprenticeship achievement rates

The data also show ethnic disparities in achievement rates. In 2022/23, minority ethnic apprentices aged 16-18 had an achievement rate of 52.0%, compared to 56.8% for white apprentices.[17] The achievement rate for minority ethnic apprentices aged 19-23 was 51.8%, compared to 60.1% for white apprentices.

Broken down further, Black apprentices had the lowest achievement rates (49.7% for those aged 16-18 and 46.0% for those aged 19-23). For Asian apprentices, the achievement rates were 55.1% for those aged 16-18, and 54.3% for those aged 19-23.[18]

Between 2019/20 and 2022/23, achievement rates fell slightly for both minority ethnic and white apprentices. However, throughout the period achievement rates for white young people were higher than for ethnically minoritised young people.

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[17] Achievement rates are derived from the DfE apprenticeships data, and refer to the proportion of apprenticeship leavers who successfully pass the whole framework or standard. It should be noted that while start rates were derived for a unified 16-24 age category, achievement percentages are only available broken down into 16-18 and 19-23 age groups.

[18] We have focused our analysis on young people from Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi backgrounds where this data is available. In some instances, data for these ethnic groups is not available, the sample sizes are too small to conduct meaningful analysis, or figures cannot be published because the small sample size risks anonymity. In these cases, we have necessarily adopted broader ethnic categories (white, Black, and Asian or white and minority ethnic). However, we acknowledge that there are variations in the experiences of different ethnic groups (for example, between Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese individuals) which are masked when adopting these broader categories.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design, engaging with a range of participants to explore the recruitment and retention of minority ethnic apprentices, and perspectives on the drivers of ethnic disparities. This included:

- Six interviews with relevant stakeholders, including academic experts, representatives of voluntary community sector organisations (VCS) and employer / training provider representative bodies.

- Case study research, comprising a mix of interviews and focus groups with employers (5), training providers (4) and minority ethnic young people (20) with experience of undertaking apprenticeships.

Interviews with relevant stakeholders

Stakeholder interviews sought to explore two areas:

1. The perceived impact of apprenticeship policy developments on ethnic disparities, and

2. Evidence and knowledge on the drivers of apprenticeship ethnic disparities, including:

   o The availability of relevant national, regional or local data sources on apprenticeships that disaggregate based on sector and ethnicity.

   o Factors that influence young people's career aspirations and views on apprenticeships, and how these might vary among different minority ethnic communities.

   o Training providers' and employers' views on the recruitment and retention of apprentices, including any perceived differences based on ethnicity.

Participants were selected based on known and identifiable subject expertise, and purposively sampled to ensure a spread across academic, VCS and relevant representative bodies. Participants were recruited directly by NatCen via the use of publicly available contact details, and with the support of Youth Futures' and the project steering group's networks. Each participant was provided with a project information sheet and privacy notice outlining the focus of the study, requirements of participation, assurances (and limitations) of anonymity, and how their personal and interview data will be used (see Appendix E and F). One-to-one, remote interviews with

stakeholders were conducted between May and July 2024. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Case study research

This project adopted an embedded case study research design. This was to help ensure the research findings reflect the varied nature and composition of apprenticeships regionally; as well as to enable comparison across multiple units of analysis, namely geographic regions, sectors and different minority ethnic groups.

Choice of which geographic regions and minority ethnic groups were to be the focus of the case study research was informed by analysis of 2022/2023 Department for Education (DfE) apprenticeship data. We decided that the research should focus on areas with more ethnically diverse populations. This was to support recruitment, given the relatively specific nature of our target population. Further analysis showed disparities in the take-up and completion of apprenticeships between white and minority ethnic young people in London, the West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber.

We decided, in collaboration with Youth Futures, that the focus of this research would be on the experiences of Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people. This was due to existing evidence that shows Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people face multiple barriers to employment, including racial discrimination.

The case study design was based on two Sector Subject Areas: Business Administration and Law and Health, Public Services and Care.[19] This was to ensure similarity in the labour market experiences discussed by participants in each case study, while avoiding restricting insights to more granular industries. Our choice of Sector Subject Areas was further informed by our analysis of DfE 2022/2023 apprenticeship data which showed comparatively large numbers and higher proportions of apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds within these sectors in our regions of interest.

Together with Youth Futures, we also decided that case studies will focus on Level 2 (Intermediate) and Level 3 (Advanced) apprenticeships only. This was to ensure consistency in the pathways and experiences of those taking part in the research, as well as to reflect the fact that young apprentices aged under 25 are more likely to be on Level 2 and 3 programmes.

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[19] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/types-of-regulated-qualifications/qualification-descriptions
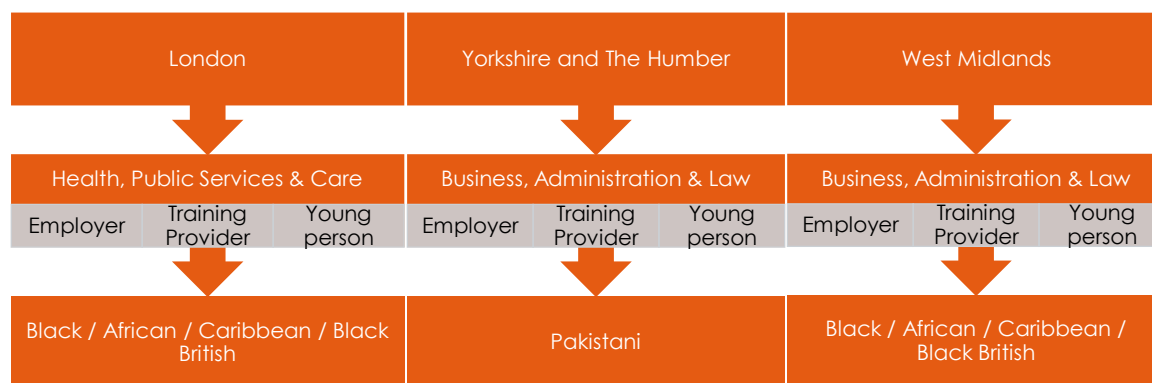
In total, we sought to undertake six case studies (two per region and sector), which included:

- Interviews with apprenticeship training providers.
- Interviews with employers hiring apprentices.
- Focus groups with young people from minority ethnic backgrounds with apprenticeship experience.

Due to challenges that we faced in recruiting different participant groups, we were only able to complete three case studies out of the target of six. These case studies are presented in full at the end of the report.

A summary of the case study research design is provided in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Case study research design

London	Yorkshire and The Humber	West Midlands
Health, Public Services & Care	Business, Administration & Law	Business, Administration & Law
Employer / Training Provider / Young person	Employer / Training Provider / Young person	Employer / Training Provider / Young person
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	Pakistani	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

Details of the final sample are provided in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Interviews achieved by participant group

Participant type	Type of encounter	Sample size
Stakeholders (policy experts, academics and VCS stakeholders)	Interviews	6
Training providers	Interviews	4
Employers	Interviews	5
Young people	Focus groups & interviews	20

Interviews with training providers and employers

Interviews with employers and training providers sought to explore:

- The nature and composition of the local apprenticeship sector.

- Information on local arrangements between training providers and employers.

- The availability of local-level data relevant to the diversity of apprentices.

- Factors that impact upon applications for apprenticeships from different ethnic backgrounds.

- Factors that influence young people's career aspirations and engagement with apprenticeships.

- Views on the recruitment and retention of apprentices.

There are multiple challenges in recruiting employers and training providers to voluntarily take part in research exploring ethnic disparities. This includes concerns around reputational risk and the extent to which their anonymity and confidentiality can be assured. To address these challenges, we adopted a multi-strand recruitment approach. This comprised:

- Making direct contact with training providers and employers via publicly available contact details held within national and local apprenticeship and traineeship databases.

- Facilitated contact through relevant employer and training provider networks, including those specifically focused on promoting diversity and inclusion in the apprenticeship sector.

- Snowballing through existing participants.

Each participant was provided with a project information sheet and privacy notice [Appendix E] outlining the focus of the study, requirements of participation, assurances (and limitations) of anonymity, and how their personal and interview data will be used.

Across the six case studies, we conducted nine remote interviews with employers (5) and training providers (4). These were conducted between August and October 2024. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Qualitative interviews and focus groups with Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people in apprenticeships

Across the six case study regions and sectors, we engaged with 20 Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people aged between 18 and 26, all of whom had undertook a Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeship in the last 2 years.

Focus groups with Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people sought to explore:

- The decision-making process behind applying for an apprenticeship.
- Sources of information when considering an apprenticeship application.
- Expectations of apprenticeships.
- Experiences of their apprenticeship programmes.
- Any factors that lead to young people considering withdrawing from their apprenticeship.

We adopted a multi-strand approach to the recruitment of young people. This included:

- Working with general and specialist minority ethnic population recruitment agencies.
- Disseminating project information through apprenticeship networks, including those focused specifically on supporting apprentices from Black and other minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Snowballing through participants' personal networks.

Focus groups were designed to be conducted with single minority ethnic groups (i.e., with Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants only). This was to avoid the homogenisation of experiences in both data collection and analysis. In instances where recruitment challenges meant it was not possible to conduct focus groups with single minority ethnic groups, a higher-level categorisation of ethnicity was used instead.[20] These focus groups were actively moderated to ensure data collection and analysis disaggregated the experiences of single minority ethnic groups throughout. Similarly, the case studies presented in the report disaggregate the personal experiences and views of different minority ethnic groups.

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[20] This included, for example, bringing together Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people using the five high-level ethnic group categorisations.

To maintain the focus on ethnic disparities during interviews and focus groups, we provided participants with evidence of ethnic disparities that exist within apprenticeships in their sector and region. This gave them context and allowed them to reflect on these disparities while they talked about their personal experiences. It also allowed them to reflect on wider trends in their sectors and regions and the reasons behind them.

In response to participant preferences and recruitment challenges, some one-to-one interviews were conducted with young people instead of focus groups. In total we conducted six focus groups and seven one-to-one interviews. All interviews and focus groups were conducted remotely and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. This change in the design to allow interviews with young people was beneficial as it allowed for a more in-depth exploration of any discrimination that they faced while pursuing apprenticeships. While focus groups were useful in encouraging discussions around similarities and differences of participants, in-depth interviews allowed for an additional exploration of young people's personal experiences.

Due to the nature and focus of this research, qualitative interviews and focus groups presented a risk of exploring participants' (in)direct experiences of systemic and/or interpersonal racism. We therefore adopted a trauma-informed, anti-racist research design. This included detailed explanation of the purpose and nature of the study in all project materials; the development and implementation of a bespoke safeguarding strategy; signposting specialist support services pre- and post- participation, and the use of matched paired moderation on the basis of ethnicity. This project was subject to approval from NatCen's internal Research Ethics Committee (REC).

Qualitative analysis

All data collection was guided by semi-structured topic guides, developed in collaboration with Youth Futures Foundation (Appendices A, B, C and D). With participants' permission, all interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. NatCen's Framework approach was used to systematically manage and analyse qualitative data.[21] This involved the development of a bespoke thematic framework, which drew out similarities and differences between geographic areas, sectors and different minority ethnic groups.

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[21] Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nicholls, C., and Ormston, R. [eds.] (2013). *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London: Sage.

Limitations

As a result of challenges recruiting employees, training providers and young people, this report presents three full case studies out of the intended six.

The employers and training providers that we interviewed had varying levels of engagement and awareness about ethnic disparities in apprenticeships. This meant that some interviews focused on the recruitment and retention of apprentices more generally, as opposed to specifically with minority ethnic groups. This was particularly the case for employers who often did not recognise that ethnic disparities in apprenticeships existed within their region and sector.

To ensure the focus of the research remained on exploring ethnic disparities, and to avoid overly restrictive sub-sampling criteria, quotas for additional demographic characteristics (such as socio-economic background or impairment) were not set. As such, while this research does explore intersectional experiences where possible, further research is recommended to better understand the interaction between ethnicity and other demographic characteristics, and their contribution to ethnic disparities.

Due to the relatively small-scale, qualitative nature of this research, there are limits to the generalisability of the findings. Interviews and focus groups, however, provide detailed insights into participants' personal experiences, as well as their broader reflections on drivers of ethnic disparities in apprenticeships.

Report Structure

The findings of this report are presented across six chapters:

- Chapter One explores different participant groups' views on the drivers of ethnic disparities in apprenticeship start, completion and achievement rates.

- Chapter Two outlines key findings regarding key stages of the apprenticeship journey, drawing primarily from qualitative research with minority ethnic young people. This includes young people's experiences and reflections on deciding to undertake an apprenticeship; finding and applying for an apprenticeship; starting and undertaking an apprenticeship; and reflections on the reasons why they might leave an apprenticeship.

- Chapter Three outlines participants' strategies and recommendations to address ethnic disparities in apprenticeship recruitment.

- Chapter Four outlines participants' strategies and recommendations to address ethnic disparities in apprenticeship retention and achievement.

- Chapter Five presents case studies, drawing out findings related to specific regions, sectors and minority ethnic groups. This includes:

    - Case Study One: Health, Public Services and Care in London.

    - Case Study Two: Business, Administration and Law in Yorkshire and the Humber.

    - Case Study Three: Business, Administration and Law in the West Midlands.

1. Views on drivers of ethnic disparities in apprenticeships

This chapter explores different participant groups' views on the drivers of ethnic disparities in apprenticeship start, completion and achievements rates.

1.1 Young people's views on ethnic disparities in apprenticeships

When presented with data on ethnic disparities in apprenticeship starts, completions and achievements, young people shared mixed views. Some young people said that they experienced confusion, as their own experience had been of diverse apprenticeship cohorts, with no noticeable differences in who started or completed. Other young people reported several possible reasons for ethnic disparities[22]:

- Pakistani and Black young people said that more people have been applying to apprenticeships in recent years compared to the number of vacancies and opportunities that have been available. This made it **difficult to find vacancies** and made the application process harder for them. This issue was exacerbated by some apprenticeships being very far away from applicants' homes and requiring that they travel into a workplace every day.

- A lack of encouragement to start and complete apprenticeships. Young people suggested ethnic disparities in apprenticeship starts are likely due to **minority ethnic parents typically encouraging their children to apply to universities**, rather than undertake an apprenticeship. Young people also highlighted that those minority ethnic parents who were not born in the UK may also have lower awareness of apprenticeships as an option.

- Black and Pakistani young people reported that since apprenticeships were not as common as other education routes, it was likely that **friends and family did not have a detailed understanding of what apprenticeships entailed**. This in turn could result in **a lack of a support system**, negatively impacting participation and potentially resulting in higher rates of non-completion.

- Young people reported that **apprenticeships do not pay very well**, which could result in an **expectation to take on additional jobs** to help support

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[22] The findings in this section relate specifically to young people's experiences on apprenticeships. However, some of these experiences – including of racism and discrimination– also reflect those reported by minority ethnic young people in the workplace more broadly. For example, see: Discrimination and work: breaking down the barriers faced by ethnically minoritised young people - Youth Futures Foundation.

their parents and families. They mentioned that supporting parents seemed to be much more common in minority ethnic group households compared to white households. Young people explained that for those minority ethnic young people taking on additional jobs, it would be difficult to balance work and coursework. This could then lead to lower achievement rates as well as lower pass rates in the end-point assessments. However, young people's views on pay and financial barriers were nuanced, and in some cases, they considered the apprenticeship wage to be preferable to student debt incurred through higher education. This other viewpoint is discussed further in section 2.1.

- Young people reported that a **lack of minority ethnic role models and representation in the workplace** could have a negative effect on minority ethnic young people's engagement with apprenticeships. They highlighted the importance of seeing people "who looked like them" in different roles. They said that this could be driving both lower starts and higher levels of non-completion among minority ethnic young people.

- **Lack of diversity and inclusion in the course environment.** One experience reported by a Black young person was that the course component of their scheme largely consisted of white young people. They had expected more ethnic diversity, and so this had surprised them.

"Apprenticeship sector is for sure dominated by white people and white British people."

The experience of being one of the only minority ethnic young people on the course had made them feel anxious and isolated, as they were worried about not fitting in.

- Pakistani and Black young people mentioned a potential **mismatch between apprentices' and employers' personal values and religious beliefs**, which could act as a deterrent to those young people starting or completing an apprenticeship. Common examples referred to an alcohol-focused culture at work events, as well as lack of understanding from employers regarding religious and cultural practices, particularly around experiences of religious holidays.

"I think firstly, I actually considered the employer reputation and values, and I think that is very important. Coming from a very religious background, I think… that was really necessary"

- Young people described how **past experiences of discrimination and racism can deter one from entering apprenticeships**, explaining disparities

in starts. One young Black person recounted how they had previously felt "inadequate due to their skin colour" and spoken down to by others.

"The black kids and those from other skin colours, I don't think are taken seriously into consideration."

- Such prior experiences of discrimination and racism were described as potentially deterring minority ethnic young people from entering apprenticeships, potentially leading to lower starts, especially if they perceived the sector to be majority white.

"They feel like 'if I get involved in this, the level of discrimination and rejection I will feel is actually going to be really bad, so I do not want to be part of it'."

- Young people also reported that once they enter an apprenticeship, **past instances of racism can also negatively impact their experience of completing the apprenticeship day-to-day**. One young Black person recounted how they were now anticipating racism from colleagues and service users, and that this made the workplace environment "difficult" for them.

- Young people recounted several **instances of racism from colleagues and service users/customers when undertaking an apprenticeship**. Examples included colleagues not greeting them in the workplace but then greeting those from white backgrounds, and patients refusing treatments specifically from minority ethnic apprentices in healthcare settings. Both Black and Pakistani young people reported that such experiences of racism may be affecting completion and achievement rates among minority ethnic young people.

"Rejection experienced due to discrimination is too much for some apprentices to handle, leading to struggles completing programmes."

- Black young people reflected that both training providers and employers sometimes have **systemic stereotypes and low expectations** about Black young people, which may influence how young people feel about themselves and their own role within their organisation. In their view, this was a case of "discrimination driving disparities".

- Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black young people across sectors and regions reported a **lack of support from employers and training providers to prepare them for end-point assessments and other assignments**. Young people said that managing their workload with assignments was challenging. They described deadlines for both work and their course as inflexible, and that they often lacked time to provide high-quality work for both their placement and their course. On end-point assessments, young

people reported that these had been scheduled to take place when their workload at their placement was already high. One view among young people was that some **employers may offer more support to white apprentices** compared to those from minority ethnic backgrounds, and this may contribute to disparities in achievements in end-point assessments.

1.2 Training provider and stakeholder views on ethnic disparities in apprenticeships

We asked training providers and stakeholders for their views on the potential drivers of ethnic disparities in apprenticeship starts. Stakeholders offered a wide range of different drivers, while training providers did not always agree that these disparities existed in their own regions and sectors. The following drivers were similar to those reported by young people:

- Stakeholders viewed one driver of disparities to be **a lack of apprenticeship opportunities**, including a perceived lack of apprenticeship opportunities in areas with higher proportions of minority ethnic populations. They also discussed travel distances between apprenticeship placements and the home being a factor. For example, if young people live in areas where more opportunities exist, they are more likely to be aware of them and pursue them.

- **Perceived misconceptions about apprenticeships** among minority ethnic groups. Some training providers suggested parents and communities may hold the belief that apprenticeships are not for academically high-achieving students, or that apprentices cannot rise to more senior positions, which may impact applications. For example, one training provider stated that young people from minority ethnic communities and their families often have negative perceptions of apprenticeships. One VCS stakeholder also suggested that parents in Asian communities commonly expect their children to choose higher education, not work-based learning like apprenticeships. Some stakeholders also reported how some minority ethnic communities' views on gender, work and home may specifically prevent women from these communities from entering an apprenticeship.

- Training providers perceived that **employers lacking in cultural awareness and sensitivity** may be contributing to disparities in apprenticeship starts and completions. An example is of work-related events being centred around alcohol, thus excluding Muslim apprentices from taking part in social events. Training providers also mentioned a lack of sufficient support systems for minority ethnic apprentices. They explained that adequate

employer support is important for the success of all apprenticeships but suggested that minority ethnic apprentices may particularly benefit from one-to-one and tailored support and regular review meetings. Thirdly, training providers mentioned that employers may have internal images of who they want to employ, which affects who they hire, and which in turn excludes some young people (e.g. those dressed in ethnic or religious clothing). Finally, training providers mentioned that employers may have low expectations of young people from certain communities (they did not mention specific communities as examples).

- **A lack of representation and role models in apprenticeships**. Stakeholders described the importance of connected and relatable role models for young people, and how a lack of role models in apprenticeships, good quality jobs or senior positions, can negatively impact their willingness to take up or remain in an apprenticeship. As part of this, stakeholders reported how the underrepresentation of minority ethnic groups in apprenticeships, sectors and workplaces can compromise young people's sense of belonging.

These views from training providers and stakeholders were additional to those mentioned by young people:

- Another barrier mentioned by stakeholders was the **minimum entry requirements**, as rates of GCSE English and Maths attainment varies between ethnic (and gender) groups. For example, one stakeholder referred to the statistics that Black Caribbean boys do less well at GCSE Maths and English than other ethnic groups.[23] [24]

- Training providers also discussed the **intersectionality of socio-economic status and ethnicity,** as apprentices from disadvantaged communities may have less secure housing arrangements, lower levels of functional skills, and lack confidence, communication and interview skills.

- Lastly, stakeholders highlighted how ethnic disparities in apprenticeships reflect wider employment and labour market trends. Firstly, they discussed **a racialised labour market**, characterised by higher rates of

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[23] Despite this requirement for GCSE Maths and English being an exit requirement rather than an entry requirement, recent research from AELP highlighted that in effect this requirement meant that only 1 in 4 apprenticeship vacancies were open to applicants without their functional skills. In response to this, the government have announced the relaxation of the exit requirement for functional skills for apprenticeships for those aged 19 and above.

[24] GOV.UK, 2024. *GCSE English and maths results.* [online] Available at: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/a-to-c-in-english-and-maths-gcse-attainment-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest/

unemployment among specific minority ethnic groups, and sectors (such as construction) being dominated by white employees.[25]

"I think for me, that is still where systemic racism is playing a factor with the labour market and with employers. I think that is a real challenge."

They also discussed **racialised management hierarchies,** characterised by disparities and the underrepresentation of minority ethnic employees in senior positions across the workforce.

1.3 Employers' views on disparities in apprenticeships

We also asked employers for their perspectives on why ethnic disparities exist in apprenticeships and to comment on the data available that shows that apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to achieve or complete apprenticeships in their respective sector and region. Employer views ranged from general agreement that disparities do exist, to surprise as they do not reflect their own experience of the sector and region. Among those employers who acknowledged that disparities do exist, one explanation was that their organisation did not offer enough opportunities in ethnically diverse areas, leading to lower participation by minority ethnic groups due to geographical spread.

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[25] For example, 4% of Black and 3% of Asian 16–64-year-olds with a Level 4 qualification and above are unemployed compared to 2% of white 16–64-year-olds. GOV.UK, 2023. *unemployment by qualification level.* [online] Available at: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment-by-qualification-level/latest/

2. The apprenticeship journey

This chapter outlines key findings regarding the apprenticeship journey. It draws primarily from qualitative research with minority ethnic young people, with supplementary insights from employers and training providers throughout. The chapter outlines: the factors contributing to young people's decision to undertake an apprenticeship, including sources of influence and information; experiences of applying and interviewing for an apprenticeship; experiences starting an apprenticeship; positive and negative experiences while undertaking an apprenticeship; and reasons for non-completion.

2.1 Deciding to undertake an apprenticeship

Throughout data collection, young people outlined several factors that contributed to their decision-making regarding pursuing apprenticeships. These included:

- **Financial reasons**, particularly when considering the option between university or pursuing an apprenticeship. Participants viewed university as a way of "getting into debt with student loans" and said that they were **keen to avoid becoming a financial burden for their families**. Both young people and stakeholders discussed the cost-of-living crisis, and how it is factoring into young people's decision-making about whether to go to university or follow another route. From the perspective of the young people, apprenticeships allowed them to get paid while gaining job experience. This made them feel like productive and useful members of society who were contributing to their family, as well as the economy.

- Apprenticeships provided an opportunity for young people **to make their learning more practical** and did not "confine us to a classroom". Young people from all minority ethnic groups highlighted that they gained practical skills as a part of their apprenticeships and felt that this was a more effective way to learn. This was viewed very positively especially by those who worked in the Health, Public Services and Care sector since the sector relies on hands-on experience.

- Related to this, young people described **not wanting to pursue an academic path** or be in a school setting after sixth-form college and instead preferred being in a work environment. They mentioned having found A-levels difficult, and how this had de-motivated them from going to university. Similarly, employers perceived that young people, usually

school and college leavers, apply for apprenticeships as it provides them with a route out of education and into first time employment.

2.2 Sources of influence for young people

Employers, training providers, young people and stakeholders explored sources of influence that played a role in young people's decision making about whether to undertake an apprenticeship.

All participants reported the **significant role of parents, wider family and friends**. Young people across all minority ethnic groups stated that conversations with, or job roles of, parents, siblings, cousins and friends had motivated them to pursue apprenticeships. It was particularly helpful if a family member had pursued apprenticeships themselves as they were able to provide more guidance and information to young people about the application process and benefits of apprenticeships. This view was echoed by stakeholders who said that **if young people personally knew someone who was pursuing an apprenticeship, they were more likely to pursue one themselves**.

Some young people reported that their families viewed apprenticeships positively; as an opportunity to earn money while learning and increasing their employability through gaining practical experience. In the majority, however, young people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups said that apprenticeships were not socially acceptable among their friends and family and that among their parents, university is considered the "biggest thing that everyone would want their child to do". Among Black young people, there was a similar view reported among parents that university is the preferred option, and that parents considered apprenticeships to be for young people who were less academically capable and who could not get into university. It is worth acknowledging that with the introduction of degree apprenticeships in 2015/16, the choice between apprenticeships and university is no longer a binary one. However, these findings suggest that this distinction is still being drawn by parents and perhaps young people.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people recounted having to spend a considerable amount of time convincing their families that apprenticeships were a good career path. Young people reported that resistance from parents increased the pressure on them to "prove themselves as everyone was questioning our decisions". To convince their parents, these young people had highlighted the relatively low financial burden of apprenticeships compared to university degrees, and that they still offered an entry route into "respectable" jobs in, for example, the Business, Administration and Law

sector. Young people had also used examples of other young people from their community who had completed apprenticeships.

Another source of influence was **teachers**. Young people who reported on this said their teachers at school had influenced them to apply. Their teachers had been aware of their desire not to pursue an academic route by choosing universities and had offered apprenticeships as an alternative. These teachers had a positive view on apprenticeships and had presented them as a viable option. In some cases, **school careers advisers** had also given young people guidance on how to apply for apprenticeships.

Young people also highlighted how they used **social media**, specifically **TikTok,** to find videos related to apprenticeships, and follow influencers who were already pursuing apprenticeships. The perspectives gained from social media were described as valuable as they improved young people's understanding of what apprenticeships entail in practice.

2.3 Finding an apprenticeship

In interviews and focus groups, young people were asked to reflect on their experiences of finding apprenticeships chronologically. This included reflections on the types of information available about apprenticeships, how they applied and their views about the application process.

Young people from all three minority ethnic groups (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black) had mixed views on the types of information that was available to them about apprenticeships and the quality and accuracy of this information. One view was that there was a **lack of information** available to them which had made it difficult for them to enrol onto apprenticeships. They mentioned that they had to rely on finding out specific information from their own personal contacts, for example, family and friends who had completed apprenticeships. In some instances, they had been able to seek guidance from their school counsellors and teachers who gave them detailed information about course lengths and requirements. Some schools had had partnerships with professional networks that provided personalised guidance to their students about apprenticeships. Young people viewed such personal contacts as "reliable and authentic" sources of information.

Another view among young people was that they had to rely on **searching online for information about apprenticeships and prospective employers**. Young people had mixed views about the value of online information. On the one hand, they were able to use online advertisements and TikTok videos to gain more insights into how to apply for apprenticeships. Young people also used employer websites and social media to gain more information about the culture and values of the organisations that they planned on applying to.

Young people reported finding the National Apprenticeship Service website particularly helpful when researching jobs and said it provided useful information about what apprenticeships involve.

On the other hand, young people recounted **negative experiences with the quality of online information** that was available about apprenticeships. They highlighted that online information was "vague and broad" and the "wording on websites was not helpful". They mentioned that it was very difficult to find sector-specific information related to apprenticeships and at times, they found outdated vacancies on websites.

When comparing the information available about apprenticeships with the information available about universities, young people from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black backgrounds agreed that universities had a more centralised approach to providing information about their courses and how to apply to them (i.e. through UCAS)(it should be noted that UCAS does also offer an apprenticeship search engine, but this service is not well known. This explains the low awareness about it among young people participants). Young people explained that to find information about apprenticeships, one is required to use different websites to find vacancies and apply, and often without guidance or support. Outside online sources, it was similarly easier to find out information about university education as most personal contacts the young people had had gone to university and not completed an apprenticeship.

2.4 Applying for an apprenticeship

When asked about their experiences of applying for apprenticeships, young people from all minority ethnic groups (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black groups) were in consensus that their apprenticeship application process had been easy and "straightforward". However, it is important to keep in mind that for this research study, we only interviewed young people who had been successful in their apprenticeship application process.

Describing their application process, young people said that they had been required to prepare CVs and application forms. Some applications required them to complete additional psychometric tests. Young people again shared positive views about the National Apprenticeship Service website which they used to make their applications. They said that it had a good layout, and it was easy to keep track of their applications through the website.

Pakistani and Black young people reported having received help from their parents, friends or teachers/careers counsellors in completing their apprenticeship application forms. One view was that having this support while filling applications made them feel more confident while applying.

Young people from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black backgrounds reflected on the **facilitators** that helped them apply for apprenticeships and provided a rationale for them. They were in consensus about the facilitators, as follows:

- **Personal contacts who had completed apprenticeships themselves** were considered key facilitators to the application process as they were able to help young people understand the application process and expectations from their roles. Young people viewed such personal contacts as "mentors" who could provide accurate guidance.

- **Having a clear sectoral focus from the start** acted as a facilitator for young people as this allowed them to focus their efforts on applications for specific sectors and roles. Having a clear sectoral focus from the start helped them find vacancies and prepare targeted CVs.

- **Attending networking events organised by school career advisors/managers** could help young people gain access to better sources of information. Additionally, careers managers could help them understand the entry requirements in a more accessible way. Moreover, networking events could provide a chance for young people to connect with companies.

2.5 Starting an apprenticeship

In interviews and focus groups, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black young people were asked to reflect on **whether they felt informed at the start of their apprenticeships of what was expected of them.**

One perspective among Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black young people was that they **lacked adequate information about what was expected of them**. They mentioned that they had received website links and modules, but this had not adequately prepared them to take on their responsibilities. This was reflected in young people's discussions about underestimating what their apprenticeships would entail.

Additionally, young people stated that undertaking an apprenticeship was very different compared to being at school. They had been **confused by the new environment in the workplace**, and did not know what was expected of them. They mentioned that these feelings of confusion could be avoided if more support and information was shared with them by the employers and training providers to help them make the adjustment. At its worst, young people reported that this **sometimes led to mental health challenges**.

"I felt really overwhelmed (…) I almost had anxiety at some point or depression. I wasn't sure of what was happening."

These struggles were exacerbated in cases where young people lacked support from their parents. In these cases, young people reported that their parents were not well-versed in apprenticeships and could not offer the adequate support. Instead, they relied entirely on the support they received from employers, training providers or online sources.

In contrast, other young people said that they had "clearly understood the requirements and expectations for the apprenticeships" and were well informed. They discussed several factors that had helped them feel better informed about what was expected of them at their apprenticeships:

- **Clear manuals and introductory sessions** with employers and training providers helped them understand what the apprenticeships were about and what was expected of them.

- **Support of more experienced employers or having a training coach or buddy with similar experiences at work helped young people settle more easily into their new role**. Additionally, young people had found it useful to shadow their colleagues and learn from them.

  "It's more like a support system to you, and it makes you keep pushing. It gives you strength never to give up and all of that."

- **A gradual induction process to either the course or the work placement also made the transition easier**. In one example, the young people continued to receive support from their training providers about their classes and practical sessions were useful in helping young people feel better informed about what was coming up. In another example, apprentices were given a month-long training module to learn about the job before being given any work tasks.

- **Taster sessions at jobs were considered beneficial** in giving young people a full experience of what they were getting into.

2.6 Positive experiences of doing an apprenticeship

Young people were asked to consider both the positive and negative experiences of completing their apprenticeship. Reflecting on the positives, young people discussed how their apprenticeship had been "a transformative experience" that allowed them to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. This had helped **shape their confidence** to embrace any challenges with a positive attitude.

"It improved my self-confidence because I noticed that no matter how scared I was, no matter how impossible it looked, I navigated it. I actually did

it. So, what I got from that was I can always adapt to anything. I just need to face it head on; I will always adapt to it."

Young people described having developed **better communication skills** as a result of their apprenticeship. This had enabled them to work as more efficient team members. **Working as part of team** was mentioned as another positive aspect:

"I enjoy being part of a team, having the space to make mistakes and learn. (It's) been a beautiful experience."

Additionally, young people appreciated having the **chance to work with professionals in their fields** as this has helped build their skills and provided networking opportunities. These interactions helped them gain further clarity in their career paths.

"Networking helped discover my strength, my interest, and my career path."

Another view among young people was that they had received **good support from their employers and training providers** which contributed to their apprenticeship being a fruitful experience for them. In addition, young people had had **positive peer interactions and made friends** during their apprenticeship schemes.

2.7 Negative experiences of doing an apprenticeship

In interviews and focus groups, young people from all minority ethnic groups (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black) also detailed their negative experiences with apprenticeships. They provided a range of different factors that contributed to these negative experiences. These are categorised below:

- Young people said that **managing their workload with assignments was difficult**, especially during exam season. They mentioned that managing workload for an apprenticeship was very different from managing it for school. For example, at college they were able to dedicate whole days to catching up on assignments, which was no longer possible in their apprenticeship since they spent several days a week at their placement.

- They highlighted that there was a **lack of flexibility in the deadlines** – both for their classes as well as for their jobs. This lack of flexibility contributed to making the environment at their apprenticeships intense and high-pressured.

- Additionally, apprenticeship placements were viewed as time-consuming and "draining". In particular, they **took time away from commitments at home and time with friends** that were important to the young people. Young people said that it was difficult to remain committed throughout

their apprenticeships since they experienced fatigue and were often worried about not getting enough done.

"Sometimes I go home, and I literally haven't eaten all day, so I just go straight to sleep before I think about it."

- In some instances, young people highlighted **a lack of clear communication from their training providers** around assignment and exam dates, which had made it difficult for them to prepare. Young people discussed having to chase training providers for this information.

- Moreover, young people described instances where there had been **miscommunication between the training provider and employer**. This was mainly confusion about which days the apprentices should be attending their work placement and which days their training course.

- Young people mentioned that their colleagues gave them **additional work which was not aligned with their expectations**. They perceived this to be senior colleagues unfairly offloading their own work at their expense.

"I think they just make you do all their load of work, and it's very hard to cope, especially when you don't understand what you're doing, so it's just more difficult."

- Black young people reported instances of **miscommunication with their colleagues**. They said that they had been involved in "office politics" wherein some colleagues did not get along with them and had given them negative feedback. Black young people also described **language barriers** (in the case of young people with English as an additional language) and **differences in communication styles** as posing challenges, particularly in the workplace. One example of this was young people having to adopt a more 'formal' way of speaking than they were accustomed to. Another example of this was young people being surprised about the directness of negative feedback and anger directed at them by colleagues.

"(In) my culture, there's a way you talk to people. I think sometimes they lose it, they get really angry (--), which is something I didn't grow up to see. So, I had to adapt to it."

- Additionally, Pakistani young people discussed **unfamiliarity with cultural references in predominantly white workplaces** as causing misunderstandings with colleagues. They also described feeling as if they had to change the way they speak and act with colleagues in order to fit

in. These young people reflected that these pressures may have negatively impacted their performance at work.

"It can sometimes just mean you're not yourself in the workplace, and then as a result, you're not performing to the maximum capability, because you're always concerned about the things that you might say might impact another person."

In all these scenarios, young people from across ethnic groups (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black) said that it was challenging for them to resolve miscommunications, and they **did not feel prepared to deal with these issues on their own**.

- Black young people highlighted that they had experienced **feelings of self-doubt**, wanting to prove themselves to their employers, and "imposter syndrome" during their apprenticeship. This had led to them feeling pressured to deliver high-quality work, which increased their anxiety in the workplace. This had led them to feeling unsure if they had made the right choice by entering an apprenticeship.

- Another aspect that contributed to this feeling was a perception that older colleagues did not take them seriously because they were pursuing apprenticeships. Young people mentioned that older colleagues were not very approachable and did not engage with them.

"It can be hard to talk to older colleagues when they don't really take you as seriously as your other colleagues."

- Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people reported on **cultural and religious barriers**. They mentioned that their workplace did not have minority ethnic group representation in senior positions which meant that social activities were geared towards drinking and pub-related plans. This made it **difficult for young people to engage in social events** organised by their employers since they did not drink for cultural and religious reasons. One Black young person, who described themselves as the only minority ethnic young person on their apprenticeship programme, for example, reported **feeling lonely and misunderstood**.

- Another group of Pakistani young people reported that they had not experienced either cultural or religious barriers at work. They reflected that this may be because they do not practice their religion or culture outwardly and thought that their experiences may have been different if they did, for example, wear a headscarf at work.

- Additionally, one group of Pakistani young people stated that they had experienced **negative comments from colleagues about their culture**. They said that it was difficult for them to balance maintaining professional conduct at work while at the same time not wanting to let racist comments go unaddressed. One view from young people was that negative remarks had not so far made them consider leaving their placement, and these were "challenges that they could overcome".

2.8 Deciding to leave an apprenticeship

We asked young people whether apprenticeships had met their expectations and whether they had ever considered leaving. None of the participants we spoke to had withdrawn from their apprenticeships.

Young people from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black backgrounds had mixed views on whether apprenticeships had met their initial expectations. One view was that they had entered their apprenticeship without too many expectations and had learnt very valuable things in the process. They focussed on factors like learning from peers, gaining practical experience while getting a qualification and building strong foundations within a sector as essential to their expectations being met.

However, in some instances, Pakistani and Black young people reflected on their personal considerations of withdrawing. In particular, they had considered withdrawing at the earlier stages of apprenticeships when they found it difficult to manage their workload. They mentioned having felt additional pressure since they had chosen the apprenticeship path on their own accord, in some cases against family advice.

Additionally, Pakistani and Black young people highlighted that during stressful times, they experienced anxiety related to their apprenticeships and struggled with feelings of not being able to handle the pressure.

3. Addressing ethnic disparities in apprenticeship starts

Training providers, employers and young people described a range of recruitment strategies to address ethnic disparities in apprenticeship starts. Overall, two types of recruitment strategies were identified: those targeted at young people generally, and those that specifically targeted young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The majority of the activities and recommendations provided below came from training providers and young people. Employers' recommendations focused on general recruitment strategies (rather than those targeting young people from minority ethnic backgrounds) and emphasised the importance of community outreach and diverse representation at all levels in their organisations.

3.1 General recruitment strategies

General recruitment strategies implemented and recommended included:

- **School outreach and engagement**, including school careers events, parents' evenings, careers talks and workshops, and hosting career discovery days all focused specifically on apprenticeships. It was recommended these outreach activities should focus on the benefits of apprenticeships, including the range of opportunities available, and progression routes to Level 7. As part of this, training providers expressed frustration about cutbacks on schools' careers services and that they wished for the government to reimplement funding to improve these services. They also suggest alternative services, such as Prospects and Connexxions.

- **Working with other local organisations**. This included local councils, community-based outreach charities, and local training hubs to promote opportunities and provide information through events such as whole-day sessions and dedicated talks. This suggestion was reinforced by the view that the **recruitment of apprentices should be done at a local level**, to ensure it meets local needs and is joined-up with strategic thinking within the local council and education services.

- **Promotion on social media**, such as Facebook and LinkedIn – one training provider specifically mentioned using TikTok. This included promoting success stories and "myth busters" that focus on the realities of day-to-day life as an apprentice and discredit any potentially negative misconceptions.

- Placing adverts on and **making use of a range of central government, sector-specific and voluntary community sector** (VCS) websites dedicated to advertising apprenticeship and other opportunities. It was also suggested that apprenticeship application websites should have clear information on the benefits of apprenticeships and should detail the application process in a clear and concise manner.

- **Pre-apprenticeship schemes,** focused on supporting young people to prepare for apprenticeships by developing core skills, such as interviewing and CV-writing skills. Participants also suggested offering training and support for the entry exams and applications for apprenticeships that may help potential candidates feel more prepared and confident.

- **Offering work experience placements** to develop employability skills such as confidence building, team working and presentations.

- **Advertising apprenticeships more publicly**, for example, on billboards and buses, to increase visibility. Young people suggested that this could also be done by employers who were seeking to fill vacancies with apprentices.

- **Alternative application formats like videos and portfolios** could be beneficial, so that young people can highlight skills that are relevant for the sector and role beyond just academic attainment.

3.2 Targeted recruitment strategies for minority ethnic young people

We also asked about targeted recruitment strategies for minority ethnic young people. Their responses reflected a mix of strategies which were already in place, alongside others that they recommended taking forward. Some of the strategies that were already in place included:

- Offering information about apprenticeships in **different languages and making marketing materials more accessible and culturally sensitive to all minority ethnic groups.**

- **Actively demonstrating the current diversity in existing staff and cohorts of apprentices**. This included using diverse and inclusive images in recruitment materials.

- **Involving minority ethnic 'role models' in recruitment and promotion of apprenticeships**. As part of this, one employer reported using **peers as an effective outreach strategy**, as young people can better relate to those who look and sound like them, and who have had similar life experiences.

They also recommended other strategies that could be used in the future:

- Young people who had been **successful in apprenticeships should share their stories** with others to inspire them to apply for the same routes.

- **Outreach events to engage with minority ethnic parents** to help change their views on apprenticeships.

- **Targeted approaches to outreach and recruitment,** including in schools with high rates of minority ethnic students and via religious and community leaders.

Young people also suggested ways that could help make the application process easier and **encourage applications** from minority ethnic groups. These included:

- **More transparent selection criteria set by employers** could help young people tailor their applications and prepare more effectively.

- Employers should **operate blind recruitment through removing names and other identifiable personal information** and make use of ethnically diverse interview panels.

3.3 Training provider and employer roles in recruitment

Training providers and employers discussed their respective roles and responsibilities for addressing ethnic disparities in recruitment. Stakeholders were also asked about their perception of these roles.

Employers and stakeholders emphasised that the **role of training providers was to engage young people and increase awareness about apprenticeships**, particularly at the beginning of the recruitment process. Employers mentioned that the role of training providers is to be visible in outreach. One employer described outsourcing recruitment entirely to training providers; this was considered a successful strategy, on the condition that providers are given a clear brief on what the organisation is looking for. However, it should be noted that in most cases it is the employer who makes the final hiring decision, not the training providers.

Training providers had a similar view of their own role in the apprenticeship journey. From their perspective, the key difference between them and employers is that **training providers play an "introductory role"**.

Stakeholders viewed training providers as a "very important broker for apprenticeships". As such, training providers can help embed fair recruitment practices with employers, raise awareness about apprenticeships in different communities and open up new avenues for young people.

One view among stakeholders was that training providers could be doing more to attract minority ethnic young people into apprenticeships. These

stakeholders suggested that many providers are not motivated to spread awareness about diversity in recruitment because it is easier to do what they have always done in terms of recruitment and employer engagement.

"They [training providers] don't want a hard life talking to employers about race equality or ethnic minority young people."

One stakeholder also highlighted that the training providers vary in how effective they are in promoting vacancies to young people. They reported anecdotal examples of gatekeepers who "will put vacancies out and share it where they want to share those vacancies" whereas other providers work hard at promoting vacancies to a wide group of young people.

In terms of the employer role, stakeholders and training providers stated that **employers are involved in the everyday life of apprentices** and have more time and closer relationships with apprentices. Training providers suggested that part of the role of employers is to take on the responsibility of overseeing and supporting apprentices throughout the apprenticeship. Training providers mentioned that this responsibility of support should have a specific focus for minority ethnic apprentices. Training providers also highlighted **employers' responsibility to hire diversely from entry-level to senior-level roles and create a diverse workplace**.

Employers saw their own role as **creating apprenticeship placements in the labour market** though it is worth highlighting that they were speaking generally and not about creating placements specifically for minority ethnic young people. They highlighted the role of senior leaders as being particularly important as they have the power to prioritise apprenticeships in their organisational strategy. Employers also create the opportunities for apprentices to succeed by upskilling and supporting them, through activities such as coaching and mentoring.

4. Addressing ethnic disparities in apprenticeship retention and achievement

Training providers, employers, young people and stakeholders implemented and recommended a range of strategies to retain and support apprentices, both generally and specifically to address ethnic disparities. As with strategies related to apprenticeship recruitment, most recommendations provided came from training providers and young people.

4.1 General strategies to support apprenticeship retention and achievement

Training providers gave examples of additional support that they currently provided to apprentices to support retention and achievement, and which they associated with positive outcomes. On this basis, wider adoption and support for these approaches is recommended. They include:

- **Offering more support in the learning modules** to help apprentices feel more prepared, confident, and able to complete their apprenticeships and the end-point assessment. Training providers suggested that additional funding to provide this support would help to improve the resources offered to apprentices. Some examples of this additional support included:

  - **Mock assessments** to help apprentices prepare for exams, and their endpoint assessments.

  - More assessors and tutors on learning modules to **offer more personalised support** to young people who need it:

    o Additional learning time for apprentices who are struggling.

    o Additional training for upskilling in a variety of areas, including functional skills, in particular in maths and literacy.

    o Increased access to pastoral care at the training provider.

Training providers also recommended that it would be beneficial to **offer more support to apprentices when they enter the placement**. Examples included:

- One-to-one support to apprentices, e.g. a dedicated line manager, including personalised and clearly defined goals.

- Tailoring support to the needs of the individual apprentices (e.g. for those with dyslexia or neurodivergent people who may have different needs).

- Having regular progress review meetings between apprentices and line managers, to help line managers understand how apprentices are progressing, offer support where there are issues, and to create action plans for tackling obstacles.

- Having regular meetings between apprentices and other members of staff who oversee their work, to allow apprentices to receive support and feedback about their day-to-day tasks.

- Having regular meetings between training providers, employers and young people to make young people feel recognised and valued.

- Increased access to pastoral care, employee groups and alumni events to make young people feel like they belong.

4.2 Strategies to address ethnic disparities in retention and achievement

Recommendations to promote greater retention and achievement rates among minority ethnic groups included:

- **Ensuring that employers and training providers promote diversity and equity** so that young people can pursue their apprenticeships in safe environments.

  "Promoting diversity as an employer could make the next person feel safe."

- Employers and training providers should have **mentors from diverse backgrounds** so that young people from minority ethnic groups find it easier to address any concerns that arise at work.

- Stakeholders said that employers should encourage **peer networks** so that apprentices have a forum to discuss shared issues in the workplace openly.

- Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people mentioned that employers should offer cultural support by **celebrating diverse holidays and traditions** at their organisations to make minority ethnic groups feel more included.

- Black young people stated having **more research around the reasons for disparities** and the "discrimination that happens during

apprenticeships". This could make them feel represented and ensure that "rules that prevent discrimination are being made".

- Increased funding to training providers offering apprenticeships to allow them to offer minority ethnic young people more customised support.

"I think that individual need, the fact that somebody is from a BAME background, and they may need some additional support to achieve their full potential, needs to be recognised at a funding level as well."

One training provider also suggested a range of specialist organisations that could offer **training and support employers to think about diversity and better support minority ethnic apprentices**. These included:

- Multicultural Apprenticeship and Skills Alliance (part of the Pathway Group).

- Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards.

- Black Apprentice Network.

- Muslim Apprentice Community.

- Association of Apprenticeships.

4.3 Gaps in data about apprenticeships

Academic and VCS stakeholders were asked to consider gaps in the publicly available data about apprenticeships in England. They highlighted two gaps:

- A lack of **qualitative evidence on minority ethnic apprentices' journeys** and what factors lead to positive and negative outcomes. Stakeholders highlighted a need for data on what influences and impacts the decision-making process for apprentices; the influence of role models on apprentices' decision-making, especially for sectors that hire fewer minority ethnic young people; and the types of outcomes for apprentices. More specifically, one stakeholder highlighted a gap regarding the **experiences of those with English as an additional language (EAL)** including those whose skills, knowledge and qualifications are not formally recognised in the English education system.

- A lack of **employer data on workforce diversity, including on apprenticeships**. VCS stakeholders suggested that employers should be mandated to report on the diversity of their workforce, including apprenticeships, and provide annual performance reports to demonstrate progress in recruitment and retention.

5. Case Studies

This section of the report presents case studies, drawing out findings related to specific regions, sectors and minority ethnic groups.

Case Study 1: Health, Public Services and Care in London

This case study explores ethnic disparities in apprenticeships within the Health, Public Services and Care sector in London, with a focus on the experiences of Black young people. This case study is based on:

- Interviews with two large healthcare employers that offer apprenticeships in London. One of the employers provides apprenticeships nationally while the other is based solely in London.

- A training provider that provides Level 2 to Level 5 apprenticeship training in Health and Social care in London.

- In-depth interviews with Black apprentices (aged 20-22) who were pursuing Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeships in Health, Public Services and Care in London.

Evidence of ethnic disparities

Analysis of 2022/23 Department for Education (DfE) apprenticeship data for Health, Public Services and Care in London show disparities between different minority ethnic groups. While the number of Level 2 and Level 3 starts fell between 2019/20 and 2022/23 for Black apprentices (by 30.8% and 12.6% respectively), starts increased for Asian apprentices (by 23.3% at Level 2 and 51.7% at Level 3). The number of Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeship achievements in 2022/23 between Black and Asian apprentices are relatively similar. Level 2 achievements have fallen for both groups since 2019/20, but Level 3 achievements have stayed the same for Black apprentices and increased for Asian apprentices over the same period.

Perceptions of apprenticeships in London

Across all participant groups, London was described as presenting a unique landscape for apprenticeships. This included a view that London had a **greater availability of apprenticeship opportunities** when compared to other areas in the country, and **more opportunities for progression.** Employers also suggested that London offered a wider range of training providers who specialised in different sectors, providing young people with a **significant amount of choice.** The training provider mentioned that the Greater London Authority Funds for

apprenticeships acted as a key facilitator in increasing the number of apprenticeships in London. It is worth noting that participants were discussing this specifically in relation to the Health, Public Services and Care sector which is the largest apprenticeship sector in London. Overall, London has the lowest numbers of starts/vacancies in the country.

Despite a wide range of choice, participants highlighted how **low rates of pay** for apprentices presented significant barriers to recruitment and retention due to the **high cost of living** in the capital.

Perceptions of apprenticeships in Health, Public Services and Care

There was consensus among the participating employers, training provider and young people that apprenticeships in Health, Public Services and Care are **often viewed negatively.** This included a view that apprenticeships, generally, are **considered a "lesser qualification"** and were for those who did not perform well academically. Employers countered this perception with a view that the lower entry requirements of apprenticeships had an important role in making the Health, Public Service and Care labour market more accessible. As part of this, employers and the training provider stated that young people often did not realise that there were **non-academic routes to healthcare jobs** and that they could reach higher level healthcare jobs through an apprenticeship. This was a view held by young people, who described their apprenticeship as providing a gateway for them to pursue their career in a way that was "as good as going to university".

In contrast to this view that **lower entry requirements** make apprenticeships **more accessible**, Black young people mentioned that entry requirements for **GCSEs and functional skills and employers not recognising overseas accreditations remained key barriers** to accessing apprenticeships in Health, Public Services and Care.

Employers and training providers reported that potential apprenticeship recruits often "**misunderstand what health and social care jobs entail**", and that young people have a very stigmatised view of social care jobs, seeing them as **"low-level and manual jobs"** which makes it difficult to recruit them to the sector.

In support of this, Black young people reported feeling uncomfortable when discussing the topic of pursuing an apprenticeship in Health, Public Services and Care with their friends and family members, and that **their parents were sceptical about them pursuing social care jobs** since they were not high-paying and required high-pressure, manual labour. Black young people highlighted

that social care apprenticeships in particular were viewed as **"cheap labour"** and had negative connotations attached to them.

Perceived diversity and disparities

In interviews, employers and the training provider said that the Health, Public Services and Care sector was **"ethnically diverse"** and included cohorts that represented all minority ethnic groups. The training provider mentioned that this was because the sector comprised of many different job roles that appealed to different groups. The training provider stated that this led to the recruitment of minority ethnic groups by "**naturally selecting a good representation from the communities they represented".** Another view among the employers suggested that they were actively attempting to recruit in a diverse way for the Health, Public Services and Care sector since it was beneficial for them to be representative of the communities they serve.

"If BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) cohorts bring their experiences to work (in the Health, Public Services and Care) sector, that is a big positive."

Despite the view that London was inherently diverse, employers highlighted the value of **inclusive marketing materials** as well as **inclusive interview panels** for apprenticeships in the Health, Public Services and Care sector to aid diverse recruitment.

When reflecting on disparities in their sector and region, Black apprentices mentioned that **structural barriers** could be contributing to lower participation and achievement in apprenticeships from other Black apprentices. This included systemic stereotypes and employers' and training providers' low expectations of Black apprentices, which resulted in young people having a negative mindset towards their roles. Black young people stated that this was a case of "discrimination driving disparities".

Black young people also described **language barriers and communication style differences**, which presented challenges when having to meet apprenticeship expectations to adapt to formal language**. This** could result in feelings of isolation and could increase the risk of non-completion.

Addressing ethnic disparities

Participants provided several suggestions to address ethnic disparities in Health, Public Services and Care apprenticeships in London. These included:

- **Working more closely with local communities** to ensure that they can help resolve misconceptions about apprenticeships within the Health, Public Services and Care sector.

- Targeted outreach to under-represented groups, with adequate use of inclusive marketing materials and language.

- **More support to applicants**, for example help with functional skills to support better achievement rates and reduce anxiety among young people.

- Government should consider exemptions to entry requirements as this is a barrier for recruitment to the sector. In particular, it affects employers' ability to hire migrant workers into apprenticeships.

- Actively working **to present apprenticeships at parity** with other higher education options so that they are celebrated in similar ways.

Case Study 2: Business, Administration and Law in Yorkshire and the Humber

This case study explores ethnic disparities in apprenticeships within the Business, Administration and Law sector in Yorkshire and the Humber, with a focus on the experiences of Pakistani young people. This case study is based on:

- An interview with a large employer that offers up to 800 business and administration apprenticeships in Yorkshire and the Humber.

- An interview with a training provider that provides Level 2 to Level 7 Business, Administration and Law apprenticeships to 2,000 apprentices.

- A focus group that was conducted with Pakistani apprentices (aged 21-23) who were pursuing Level 2 and Level 3 Business, Administration and Law apprenticeships.

Evidence of ethnic disparities

Among 2022/23 Business, Administration and Law apprentices in Yorkshire and the Humber, **Black apprentices had the lowest number of starts at Level 2 (20) and Level 3** (50), compared to Asian apprentices (80 at Level 2 and 280 at Level 3). Between 2019/20 and 2022/23, Level 2 starts in this sector and region fell across all groups, notably for the Asian group where starts fell by 50%. At Level 3 in the same period, there was no change for Black apprentices, but starts for Asian apprentices increased by 40%.

In 2022/23 there were no recorded achievements in this region and sector for Black apprentices at Level 2 and just 20 at Level 3. There were 60 achievements at Level 2 and 130 at Level 3 for Asian apprentices. Between 2019/20 and 2022/23, the number of achievements for Black apprentices fell at Level 2 but remained consistent at Level 3. The number of achievements by Asian apprentices also fell at Level 2 (by 50%), but achievements for this group at Level 3 increased substantially over the same period (by 62.5%).

Perceptions of apprenticeships in Yorkshire and the Humber

Participants discussed the unique regional characteristics of Yorkshire and the Humber and the impact that these might have on apprenticeship participation.

Outside the cities in the region, there **is a lack of large employers** which skews the ratio towards smaller and micro- level employers in such areas. The training provider's perspective was that this negatively impacts the uptake of apprenticeships in the region **as smaller employers do not have the necessary resources to take on apprentices.** This is further exacerbated by most colleges and training providers being based in cities and towns, making it harder to encourage apprenticeship participation in more rural areas. In addition to this, the employer and training providers perceived **a lack of transport infrastructure in the region** as a barrier to participation in apprenticeships, especially for young people who relied on public transport. Employers added that in Yorkshire, there are many disadvantaged communities, and young people often cannot afford to learn to drive, which may exclude them from some roles.

The effects of this skewed distribution of employers and training providers in the region was also felt by young people. They mentioned that Yorkshire and the Humber is spread over a large geographical area, but Business, Administration and Law apprenticeships are mostly available in the cities. They believed that the region offers **limited job roles** since "most of the job opportunities were down South" and "all Headquarters are in London".

Relatedly, the employer participant discussed how employers across the region had been struggling with apprenticeship uptake due to **economic uncertainty,** which had led to employers taking on fewer apprentices.

"We're in zero growth across the country, and especially with Yorkshire and the Humber being more affected by that… the challenge is economic growth, really. That will stimulate demand for apprenticeships."

Increasing apprenticeship participation, however, was described as at the forefront of the **mayoral agenda** in Yorkshire and the Humber, with initiatives to provide practical support to young people to undertake apprenticeships, such as support to purchase clothes and bus tickets for interviews.

Perceptions of apprenticeships in Business, Administration and Law

Participants collectively identified two key facilitators to the take up of Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeships in **Business**, Administration and Law:

- The training provider mentioned that the sector had a wide range of roles to choose from which meant that there were many different vacancies that young people could apply to.

- Additionally, the employer, training provider and young people all said that the tasks that apprentices carried out as a part of these roles were flexible

and diverse. This meant that young people could learn transferable skills and gain experience in a wide range of tasks as a part of their apprenticeships. Young people agreed that this was a key facilitator in their positive experiences with their apprenticeships and had helped them feel more confident since their apprenticeship could act as a **"starting point"** for any job that they might pursue in the future.

- Counter to this, another view among young people was that the sector was **"too vague and broad"** which made it difficult to enter as an apprentice.

Participants also discussed barriers that were specific to apprenticeships within the Business, Administration and Law sector:

- Young people and the employer specified that the sector had a **substantial lack of role models** and was dominated by white men, which could negatively impact participation from other minority ethnic groups, and from minority ethnic women.

- All participants identified that the requirement of **functional skills, especially in English and Maths**, **was a barrier** to entry as well as apprenticeship achievement.

- Participants discussed **a lack of clarity around entry requirements**. One view among young people was that the entry tests for jobs in the sector did not match the role that they applied for; as an example, entry tests that required a higher level of maths skills than **needed** for the role. Young people reported that this may have contributed to drop-outs during the application process.

- The employer stated that **apprenticeship standards within the sector are not well defined**, and that this may affect achievement rates among young people. In their view, the standards may suit larger employers but not smaller ones looking to offer opportunities to a wide range of young people. They described the current Level 3 standard as **"halfway what it used to be"** as many of the standards had been changed or removed over the years, and mentioned that removing the Level 2 standard for the sector had been a mistake.

Perceptions of diversity and disparities

The case study presented mixed views on the ethnic diversity of Business, Administration and Law apprenticeships in Yorkshire and the Humber. The training provider outlined how they had never faced issues recruiting minority

ethnic young people and that the diversity of their apprentices was a reflection of the regional general population. In the interview, the training provider reflected on the ethnicities of those that had been pursuing apprenticeship training with them and stated that different ethnic groups were accurately represented.

> *"We genuinely haven't had any data issues with either recruiting people from particular areas and particular backgrounds or those, or achieving that."*

The employer, on the other hand, highlighted that the Business, Administration and Law sector in Yorkshire and the Humber has historically struggled to recruit and retain a diverse workforce, in regard to ethnicity, as well as age and gender. They felt that the sector was "dominated mostly by older, white males" and this was reflected in apprenticeships. Within this context, this employer reported focusing on recruiting people who were "representative of communities they serve" and this had helped them set themselves apart from other organisations in the region.

When reflecting on their own reasons for choosing apprenticeships, Pakistani young people mentioned that they preferred apprenticeships over university degrees as they were able to earn money while gaining practical experience in a desirable sector. There was a consensus around this being "a difficult choice to make" as their parents had a strong preference for university degrees.

Young people mentioned that Pakistani apprentices might have parents who were not born in the UK. As a result, these parents might not be aware of the availability and viability of apprenticeships as a pathway to employment, making it difficult to convince them about apprenticeships. One young person was able to convince their parents to let them pursue an apprenticeship by explaining that this path would cause "no financial burden for their families" and still allow them to work in "reputable jobs" within the business and law sector. Young people highlighted that it was also easier to convince their parents about apprenticeships if they were able to provide examples of other people from a Pakistani background who had pursued the same route.

Additionally, young people reported a **lack of visibility of Pakistani apprentices** in Business, Administration and Law in Yorkshire and the Humber which contributed to wider disparities. This tied into their views around there being a **lack of leaders in their sector and region** who were from minority ethnic backgrounds, especially Pakistani backgrounds. Young people highlighted that they did not feel represented in higher positions within their organisations. They felt that this could make young people "nervous to join apprenticeships since

they could not see people who looked like them there". This was similar to what the employer had mentioned as a lack of "role models" in the sector.

When reflecting on disparities in their sector and region, Pakistani apprentices said that cultural and religious barriers could be contributing to lower participation and achievement in apprenticeships from other Pakistani apprentices. Some of the key barriers were:

- **Social events** were focussed on visiting the pub and drinking, which did not align with many Pakistani young people's religious beliefs. This meant that it was difficult for them to engage and socialise with their colleagues.

"We feel we can't really attend these types of social events because it's not considered good in our faith."

- **Unfamiliarity with cultural references** was discussed as a possible cause for misunderstandings with colleagues. One view among young people was that since others in their team were not from minority ethnic groups, they felt that they "had to change the way they speak and interact with others, for them to listen to you properly". They also mentioned that young Pakistani apprentices may face **language barriers and pressure to adapt their accents**. Pakistani young people reflected that this could have a negative impact on their performance at work.

Addressing ethnic disparities

Participants provided several suggestions to address ethnic disparities in Business, Administration and Law apprenticeships in Yorkshire and the Humber. One was to highlight **more diverse role models** so that young apprentices from minority ethnic groups are able to "see themselves in those roles". The employer stressed the need for **more considerations to be made for different cultures and religions while recruiting**. They suggested:

- Targeting ethnically diverse communities with special recruitment and outreach drives that focus on apprenticeships.

- Using representative and inclusive images in their marketing materials.

- Engaging parents so that they gain more awareness about apprenticeships and can help their children make informed decisions.

- Strategising with the help of those who are from diverse backgrounds so that employers gain a better understanding of what works best.

Echoing these suggestions, the training provider stressed the importance of involving ethnically diverse staff to market apprenticeship opportunities to demonstrate their intention to reach different communities. They also said it was important to provide bespoke support to apprentices.

An employer mentioned that they run a social mobility fund, which is a bursary for driving licences, so that they can support candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds in getting their driving licence and making sure they do not miss out on opportunities due to access.

Finally, young people said that the most essential step in reducing disparities was for employers, training providers and the government to firstly recognise that barriers to apprenticeships existed for minority ethnic groups. Only with honest recognition of these disparities could progress be made.

"By recognising and addressing barriers, we can create a more equitable and a diverse apprenticeship landscape for everybody. So, I'd say we should all work together … ensuring everyone has an equal chance to succeed, yes, and then reach their full potentials."

Case Study 3: Business, Administration and Law Apprenticeships in the West Midlands

This case study explores ethnic disparities in apprenticeships within the Business, Administration and Law sector in the West Midlands, with a focus on the experiences of Black young people.

This case study included:

- An interview with one large employer that offers business and administration apprenticeships.

- An interview with one training provider that provides Level 2 to Level 7 business and management apprenticeship training to around 1000 apprentices.

- A focus group and a depth interview with Black apprentices aged 20-23 years old who were pursuing Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeships in business and administration in the West Midlands.

Evidence of ethnic disparities

Between 2019/20 and 2022/23 the number of Level 2 Business, Administration and Law apprenticeships starts in the West Midlands fell for both Black (-62.5%) and Asian (-40%) apprentices. In the same period Level 3 starts slightly increased for Black (9.1%) and Asian (2.2%) apprentices.

In 2022/23, just 10 Level 2 achievements and 50 Level 3 achievements are recorded for Black apprentices in this sector and region, compared to 60 Level 2 achievements and 220 Level 3 achievements for Asian apprentices.

From 2019/20 to 2022/23, achievements at Level 2 fell by 80% for Black apprentices and 71.4% for Asian apprentices. However, the number of achievements at Level 3 grew by 25% for Black apprentices and 57.1% for Asian apprentices over the same period.

Perceptions of apprenticeships in the West Midlands

Both the employer and training provider interviews identified **strong careers provision in schools in relation to apprenticeships** within the West Midlands, which acted as a dedicated resource for recruitment to apprenticeships. They also reported that there was a good availability of apprenticeship opportunities. Young people agreed that opportunities were widely available,

but also described the market as highly competitive, particularly within the Business, Administration and Law sector.

Perceptions of apprenticeships in Business, Administration and Law

All participants suggested that apprenticeships, generally, were **negatively perceived**. Young people described how their family members and others around them perceived apprenticeships as a less desirable pathway, particularly compared to going to university. Despite this perception, all participants described how apprenticeships within the sector provided **good progression opportunities**, with young people describing how once they had gained entry into apprenticeships, it was easier for them to progress when compared to their peers who went to university.

Both the employer and training provider also outlined young people's **lack of understanding about the career routes available within the sector.** They described a particular misconception that apprenticeships were for manual labour, not for office jobs.

"They have this perception that the only roles and careers that are available are very manual, which isn't reflective of the skills and the careers that we offer."

Perceptions of diversity and disparities

The employer and the training provider presented different views on the existence of ethnic disparities within apprenticeships in the Business, Administration and Law sector in the West Midlands.

The employer was **confident** that their organisation was adequately representing minority ethnic groups in recruitment. Moreover, the employer mentioned that they had a very good relationship with schools in under-represented areas which had played a key role in ensuring greater diversity within their apprenticeship applications. Finally, the employer highlighted that the Business, Administration and Law sector offered a wide range of roles that encouraged applications from a "vast variety of young people".

The training provider said that minority ethnic young people do experience several forms of discrimination while undertaking apprenticeships in the sector. These include:

- **Perceptions from employers that minority ethnic applicants have "a lack of life skills, especially if they did not grow up in the UK".** Training providers stated that this could lead to disparities in apprenticeship starts.

- **Perceptions from employers of the 'ideal' type of candidate**. These included examples of employers having "an idea of what they expect the person sitting at reception to look like since they will be the company's image", and rejecting young people at interview based on their cultural or religious clothing.

Contrary to the above, participating **young people reported a positive view of diversity in the West Midlands**. They considered it a safe area for Black young people, which made their experiences more positive.

"I would even applaud the West Midlands… (it is) actually safe, actually accommodating. Being an apprentice in West Midlands is actually a great experience."

Black young people did however report that "most sectors are dominated by white young people". They said that this could be a deterrent for minority ethnic young people applying for apprenticeships, particularly if they have had negative experiences with discrimination and racism in the past. In their view, past experiences of discrimination could also be affecting disparities in achievement rates, which could be worsened further by a lack of adequate support systems for some young people.

Addressing ethnic disparities

Participants provided the following suggestions that could help address ethnic disparities in Business, Administration and Law apprenticeships in the West Midlands in the future:

- Community outreach to raise awareness about apprenticeships, especially by accessing schools in different areas.

- Use of social media to promote 'young success stories' to change perceptions of apprenticeships.

- Use of 'role models' to change perceptions about apprenticeships.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this report was to explore the participation of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in apprenticeships in England. It aimed to identify factors potentially contributing to ethnic disparities in apprenticeship starts, completions and achievements and to identify potential solutions to overcome these disparities.

Awareness and perceptions of apprenticeships

The findings of this research suggest parents and wider family/community networks play a significant role in decision making around apprenticeships for minority ethnic young people. Employers, training providers and young people consistently reported limited awareness and understanding of apprenticeships among minority ethnic communities. This includes a lack of understanding about the availability and potential benefits of apprenticeships, progression routes, and the variety of industries they cover. Minority ethnic parents were also consistently described as being more encouraging toward university degrees instead of apprenticeships. This can result in a lack of guidance and support for young people when navigating apprenticeship applications and requirements, which in turn can hinder their confidence and ability to apply or succeed in apprenticeship programmes.

Young people also reported how limited awareness and understanding is compounded by a lack of accessible information about the availability and requirements of apprenticeships. Personal contacts who had previously completed apprenticeships, as well as support and information from teachers, school careers advisers and social media were therefore highlighted as important in facilitating apprenticeship applications and starts.

Financial barriers

Young people reported that both the anticipation and experience of low wages within apprenticeships can be a significant deterrent, especially for those from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Low wages in apprenticeships can lead to the expectation or necessity of taking on additional jobs, which can deter applications and result in lower completion and achievement rates. Young people described an expectation to contribute to household income in their families, which they said may not exist among their white peers. Availability and cost of transport was also reported as a challenge, particularly for young people in Yorkshire and the Humber. At the same time, young people said that being able to earn a

wage and not incur student debts was one of the draws of doing an apprenticeship when compared to a university degree.

Inclusion, diversity and experiences of racism

Findings suggest that some employers lack cultural awareness and sensitivity, contributing to a lack of diversity and inclusion within apprenticeship workplace environments. This gap in understanding or accommodating the cultural and religious differences and needs of apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds can result in feelings of alienation and discrimination.

Employers, training providers and young people highlighted examples of racism across the apprenticeships sector, which were reported to contribute to lower completion and achievement rates. The racism reported by Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi apprentices included a combination of racial, cultural, and religious biases perpetuated by employers, training providers, and fellow apprentices. Black participants, in particular, reported facing systemic racial stereotypes that portray them as less capable or professional, directly impacting their treatment and support.

Some evidence also suggests that biases during the recruitment process may lead to unequal opportunities for minority ethnic candidates. Additionally, young people report how past experiences of discrimination and racism might deter those from minority ethnic backgrounds from pursuing apprenticeships, especially in sectors perceived to lack diversity. The absence and/or lack of visibility of minority ethnic role models, particularly in senior positions, within apprenticeship programmes and organisations, further undermines motivation and confidence among prospective minority ethnic applicants.

Regional and sectoral variations

Case studies highlight variation and nuance in the potential drivers of ethnic disparities in apprenticeships across different regions and sectors. This includes variation in the availability and accessibility of apprenticeships, dependent on the nature and composition of local labour markets and supporting infrastructure (such as transport links). Case studies also demonstrate variation in the salience of different factors driving ethnic disparities in apprenticeships. Examples include the significance of low rates of pay for apprenticeships in areas with higher costs of living, and varied perceptions of different sectors – such as comparably less favourable views on progression opportunities within the Health, Public Services and Care sector when compared to Business,

Administration and Law, and the availability of alternative higher education pathways (such as degrees) in sectors such as Health.

Recommendations

The findings of this research present several opportunities to help address ethnic disparities in apprenticeships starts. Key recommendations include:

- **Targeted approaches to outreach and recruitment.** This includes engagement with minority ethnic parents to help raise awareness and change views on apprenticeships, and hosting outreach in schools with high rates of minority ethnic students and via religious and community leaders.

- **Improving the availability, accessibility and inclusivity of apprenticeship marketing and recruitment materials**. This includes broadening the ways in which apprenticeship information is disseminated and providing information in different languages.

- **Actively demonstrating the diversity of existing staff and cohorts of apprentices**. This includes using diverse and inclusive imagery in recruitment materials, as well as involving minority ethnic role models to share their success stories.

- **Mitigating concerns of racial bias in the application process** and making use of ethnically diverse interview panels. This also requires building the evidence base on what works through robust research and evaluation. Blind recruitment processes (such as removing names and other identifiable personal information from applications) have emerged from this research as one potential area to explore. Youth Futures Foundation are planning to commission employer trials to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of blind recruitment processes, alongside other promising interventions to support recruitment of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key recommendations to improve retention and achievement rates among minority ethnic apprentices include:

- Employers and training providers **creating safe environments by actively promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace,** including undertaking religious and cultural awareness training. Participants suggested that this is likely to require training and support from dedicated and specialist organisations.

- **Fostering support networks for minority ethnic apprentices**. This includes providing mentors from minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as

establishing peer networks to facilitate open discussions about shared workplace challenges.

- **Enhanced pastoral and learning support**. This encompasses increased funding for resources such as mock assessments, additional tutors, personalised learning support, and functional skills training. Training providers also recommended offering one-to-one support through dedicated line managers, regular progress reviews, personalised goal-setting, and tailored assistance to meet specific needs.

Appendices

Appendix A: Topic guide for stakeholder interviews

Background and context to participant (5 mins)

- Current role and responsibilities
    - o Overview of role and responsibilities
    - o Length of time in role
- Brief description of the organisation and its purpose
    - o Policy / subject area focus
    - o Focus on education / employment outcomes, apprenticeships or ethnic disparities
        - ▪ Any focus on specific minority ethnic groups.

Ethnic disparities in apprenticeships (30 mins)

- In your view, what are the key ethnic disparities between white young people and those from minority ethnic groups that shape apprenticeship participation?
    - o Probe on disparities in:
        - ▪ Starts
        - ▪ Retention
        - ▪ Achievements
        - ▪ Availability of apprenticeships
        - ▪ Accessibility of apprenticeships
        - ▪ Entry requirements set by employers
- What are the key factors/drivers causing ethnic disparities within apprenticeships?
    - o Probe on drivers for disparities in:
        - ▪ Starts
        - ▪ Retention
        - ▪ Achievements
        - ▪ Availability of apprenticeships
        - ▪ Accessibility of apprenticeships
        - ▪ Entry requirements set by employers

- Do the disparities that you have identified differ for different minority ethnic backgrounds?
    - If so, why? If not, why not?

- Do they vary by sector?
    - If so, why? If not, why not

- Are there any other groups where there are particular disparities, for example:
    - Age
    - Gender
    - Socio-economic background
    - Special educational needs

- To what extent do the disparities you have identified reflect wider trends in education and employment?

- Views on recent developments in apprenticeship policy in England, such as:
    - COVID-19 pandemic
    - New qualification standards (i.e., mandatory requirements for off-the-job training and Level 2 English and Maths qualifications)
    - Minimum apprenticeships length requirements
    - The Apprenticeships Levy

- Are there any data sources that are useful in understanding ethnic disparities in apprenticeships, such as national or regional/local databases? How are these used by decision-makers, to the best of your knowledge?

- Are there data gaps in the current evidence ethnic disparities in apprenticeships?
    - Types of gaps
    - Their impact
    - Any suggestions to help resolve them

Young people, training providers and employers (10 mins)

Starts

- Factors that influence a young person to apply for an apprenticeship (over post-16 education, an entry-level job etc.)
    - Variation by ethnic groups
    - Variation by sectors

- Role of training providers in attracting young people into apprenticeships (in general)
    - Variation by ethnic groups
    - Variation by sectors

- Role of employers in attracting young people to apprenticeships (in general)
    - Variation by ethnic groups
    - Variation by sectors

Retention/achievement

- Suggestions to improve retention/achievement in apprenticeships for minority ethnic groups (address each topic one by one)
    - What can training providers do differently
    - What can employers do differently

Closing the interview (5 minutes)

- Any final comments
- Check participant is happy with everything they've contributed being included in our analysis and potentially quoted in outputs, given caveats to confidentiality we mentioned at the start.
- Any redaction or rephrasing they would like in their contribution?

Appendix B: Topic guide for employers

Background (5 mins)

- Brief description of role and responsibilities

    o Length of time in role

    o Brief description of the organisation

- (If not covered), ask about organisation's industry and region

- Views on diversity within your organisation

    o Probe for diversity based on ethnicity

Current organisational approach to apprenticeships (5 mins)

- Description of current approach

    o Number of apprenticeships offered

    o Level of apprenticeships offered

    o Types of placements offered, i.e., in which sectors and roles

    o Balance of apprentices that are new hires versus existing staff

- Whether organisation uses/is eligible for the Apprenticeships Levy

    o Views on the levy

    o If they have made use of the levy:

        ▪ What works well/less well about the policy

Recruitment and retention of apprentices (35 mins)

Recruitment

- Who tends to apply for apprenticeships

    o Probe for whether they collect and analyse data about ethnicity of applicants

        ▪ If yes:

            • Probe for variation by ethnic groups in the applications overall

            • Probe for variation by ethnic groups for different roles

            • Views on why certain groups tend to/tend not to apply for apprenticeships

        ▪ If not, why not

- Routes by which apprentices tend to apply

- o Whether young people typically apply directly with them or via training providers
  - Variation by ethnic group and how they apply
- o Probe for whether organisation offers support to young people in the application and hiring process
  - If yes, whether this reaches young people from minority ethnic groups
- Current recruitment strategies used for attracting apprentices
  - o For each strategy mentioned, probe whether it has worked well/less well
    - Probe for why/why not and for which groups
    - (If time) Reasons for choosing these strategies
  - o Probe specifically about events/engagement with secondary schools
    - Whether these reach young people from minority ethnic groups
- Whether current recruitment strategies specifically aim to reach minority ethnic groups
  - o If not
    - Reasons why not
    - Any future plans for including this in recruitment strategy
    - Whether they collect and analyse data about ethnicity in the hiring process, reasons why/why not
  - o If yes
    - Whether this matches with general organisational approach to hiring
      - If so, how
      - If not, why not
    - Perceived effectiveness of inclusive hiring practices
      - For each strategy mentioned, probe for what works well/less well, and why
    - Whether they collect and analyse data about ethnicity in the hiring process, reasons why/why not
- Role of training providers in attracting young people into apprenticeships
  - o How this is different from the role that employers play

- o Whether training providers have discussed or set expectations around hiring more from minority ethnic groups
  - ▪ If yes, views on this
  - o Suggestions for what training providers could do to attract more people from minority ethnic groups into apprenticeships
- Suggestions for strategies that could be used to recruit greater diversity of apprentices
  - o If yes, who should action these (i.e., employers, providers, local or national government)
  - o (If a Levy-paying organisation) Views on the Apprenticeship Levy and the extent to which it encourages/discourages inclusive hiring

Barriers and facilitators

- Barriers to applying for an apprenticeship in the x sector
  - o Any barriers that are specific to minority ethnic groups
  - o If not covered, probe for
    - ▪ Information available about apprenticeships/levels of awareness
    - ▪ Young people's beliefs or misconceptions about apprenticeships
    - ▪ Availability of apprenticeships within the sector
    - ▪ Accessibility of apprenticeships
- Facilitators to applying for an apprenticeship in the x sector
  - o Any facilitators that are specific to minority ethnic groups
  - o If not covered, probe for
    - ▪ Information available about apprenticeships/levels of awareness
    - ▪ Young people's beliefs or misconceptions about apprenticeships
    - ▪ Availability of apprenticeships within the sector
    - ▪ Accessibility of apprenticeships
- Barriers to applying for an apprenticeship within x region
  - o Any barriers specific to minority ethnic groups
- Facilitators to applying for an apprenticeship within x region
  - o Any facilitators specific to minority ethnic groups

- Suggestions for removing barriers to apprenticeships for young people from minority ethnic groups, and who should action these (e.g., employers, providers, local or national government)

Completions/Achievements

- Description of organisation's experience with apprentices completing placements
    - Probe about overall completion rates of apprentices
    - Probe whether completion rates are different for apprentices from minority ethnic groups
        - If so, views on why
- Whether they have specific strategies in place to help young people from minority ethnic groups complete their apprenticeships
    - For each strategy mentioned, probe whether it has worked well/less well
        - Probe for why/why not
- Suggestions for improving completion rates of apprentices from minority ethnic groups, and who should action these (i.e., employers, providers, local or national governments)

Disparities in apprenticeships (5-7 mins)

Interviewer script: "Data from training providers and employers show that in [Sector] and [Region], apprentices from [X] backgrounds are less likely to [participate] / [achieve] / [complete]"

- Whether they have noticed this disparity in their:
    - Region
    - Sector
    - Organisation
- View on what could be causing this disparity

Closing the interview (2 minutes)

Any final comments

Highlight that the information they have provided will be kept confidential and anonymous

Check participant is happy with everything they've contributed being included in our analysis and potentially quoted in outputs in an anonymous way

- Any redaction or rephrasing they would like in their contribution?

Thank for participation

Appendix C: Topic guide for training providers

Background (2 mins)

- Brief description of role and responsibilities
  - Length of time in role
- Brief description of the provider, including the area and the student body

Current apprenticeship offer (5-7 mins)

- Description of current offer
  - Number of apprentices being trained
  - Apprenticeship levels
  - Sectors
- Views on diversity of apprentices receiving training
  - Probe for diversity based on ethnicity

Applications and recruitment to apprenticeships (20 mins)

- Reasons why young people choose to apply for apprenticeships
  - Probe specifically for any reasons that apply to minority ethnic groups
- Types of applications received for apprenticeship training
  - Who tends to apply for apprenticeships
  - Probe for variation by ethnic groups in the applications overall
  - Probe for variation by ethnic groups for different roles
  - Views on why certain groups tend to/tend not to apply for apprenticeships
- Current strategies used for attracting young people to apprenticeships
  - For each strategy mentioned, probe whether it has worked well/less well
    - Probe for why/why not
    - (If time) Reasons for choosing these strategies
    - Any focus on attracting minority ethnic groups to apprenticeships
    - For each strategy mentioned, probe for what works well/less well and why/why not, and for which groups
- Sources of influence that could impact young people's decisions about applying to apprenticeships
  - Probe specifically for minority ethnic groups

- Role of employers in attracting young people into apprenticeships
    - How this is different from the role that training providers play
    - Whether they have discussed or set expectations with employers around hiring more from minority ethnic groups
    - Suggestions for what employers could do to attract more people from minority ethnic groups into apprenticeships
- Suggestions for strategies that could be used to attract greater diversity of young people to apprenticeships, and who should action these (e.g., employers, providers, local or national government)?

Barriers and facilitators

- Barriers to applying for an apprenticeship in the x sector
    - Any barriers that are specific to minority ethnic groups
    - If not covered, probe for
        - Information available about apprenticeships/levels of awareness
        - Young people's beliefs or misconceptions about apprenticeships
        - Availability of apprenticeships within the sector
        - Accessibility of apprenticeships
- Facilitators to applying for an apprenticeship in the x sector
    - Any facilitators that are specific to minority ethnic groups
    - If not covered, probe for
        - Information available about apprenticeships/levels of awareness
        - Young people's beliefs or misconceptions about apprenticeships
        - Availability of apprenticeships within the sector
        - Accessibility of apprenticeships
- Barriers to applying for an apprenticeship within x region
    - Any barriers specific to minority ethnic groups
- Facilitators to applying for an apprenticeship within x region
    - Any facilitators specific to minority ethnic groups
- Suggestions for removing barriers to apprenticeships for young people from minority ethnic groups, and who should action these (e.g., employers, providers, local or national government)

Completion and achievement in apprenticeships (10 mins)

- Description of completion rates within the provider
    - Probe about overall completion rates of apprentices
    - Probe whether completion rates are different for apprentices from minority ethnic groups
        - If so, views on why
    - Whether they have any specific strategies in place to help young people from minority ethnic groups complete their apprenticeships
    - For each strategy mentioned, probe whether it has worked well/less well
        - Probe for why/why not
- Description of achievement rates within the provider
    - Probe about overall achievement rates of apprentices
    - Probe whether achievement rates are different for apprentices from minority ethnic groups
        - If so, views on why
    - Whether they have any specific strategies in place to help young people from minority ethnic groups complete and pass their end point assessment
    - For each strategy mentioned, probe whether it has worked well/less well
        - Probe for why/why not
- Suggestions for improving completion and achievement rates of apprentices from minority ethnic groups, and who should action these (i.e., employers, providers, local or national governments)

Disparities in apprenticeships (10 mins)

Interviewer script: "Data from training providers and employers show that in [Sector] and [Region], apprentices from [X] backgrounds are less likely to [participate] / [achieve] / [complete]"

- Whether they have noticed this disparity in their:
    - Region
    - Sector
    - Organisation
- Views on what could be causing these disparities

Closing the interview (2 minutes)

Any final comments

Highlight that the information they have provided will be kept confidential and anonymous

Check participant is happy with everything they've contributed being included in our analysis and potentially quoted in outputs in an anonymous way

- Any redaction or rephrasing they would like in their contribution?

Thank for participation

Appendix D: Topic guide for young people

Background and context to participants (5 mins)

- Introductions

- Tell me a bit about yourself – first name, age, brief description of experience with apprenticeships

[Researcher: if any who started but later withdrew, note those individuals for later]

Decision-making about apprenticeships (10 minutes)

- Reasons why they chose apprenticeships over other options e.g., other types of education, work

- Information that was available about apprenticeships, e.g., careers guidance, employer events, online information

  o Views on quality and adequacy of information about apprenticeships, and how this compares to information about other options

- Influences on decision to apply for an apprenticeship, e.g., parents/family, teachers/school staff, friends, wider community

  o What made the biggest difference

  o Whether apprenticeships were considered acceptable/desirable by others

Finding an apprenticeship (10 minutes)

- Ease or difficulty of finding an apprenticeship

  o Factors that made it easy or difficult to find an apprenticeship in X sector, e.g., location, pay, entry requirements, employer match

  o Factors that made it easy or difficult to find an apprenticeship in X region, e.g., location, pay, employer match

- Description of the application process, i.e., how they applied, what was required

  o Help received, from whom and in what format

  o What could be better about the process

Experiences of apprenticeships (15 mins)

- How informed they felt at the start about what was expected of them

  o Whether the support/information they received upon joining was enough

  o What could have been better about the support/information received

- What is/was positive about the apprenticeship experience

[Researcher: say that you will come back to negative experiences as well]. Probe for:

- o Balance between classroom and on-the-job activities
- o Support from the employer
- o Support from the training provider
- o Opportunities to engage with peers
- o Workplace culture

- What was negative about the experience. Probe for:
  - o Balance between classroom and on-the-job activities
  - o Support from the employer
  - o Support from the training provider
  - o Opportunities to engage with peers
  - o Workplace culture
- Reflections on their experience specifically as a minority ethnic person
  - o Cultural/religious barriers
- Whether the expectations they had at the start were/have been met, and why/why not

Considerations of withdrawal (10 minutes)

- Whether they have considered / ever considered withdrawing, and why

[Researcher: say that you will come back separately to those who did decide to withdraw, if applicable]

- o Reflect back on positive/negative experiences cited earlier, if reasons are similar or if there were any additional reasons
- Reasons they decided to withdraw

[Researcher: only for those who withdrew, if applicable in the group]

- o Check if their experiences match with those already cited by others or if they had any additional reasons to withdraw

Disparities in apprenticeships (15 mins)

- Data from training providers and employers show that there are disparities between minority ethnic and white young people in how likely they are to take part in apprenticeships. Any reflections on why these disparities in taking part exist
  - o Visibility of minority ethnic apprentices in X sector and X region, generally

- o Visibility of X ethnicity apprentices in X sector and X region, specifically
  - o Barriers to taking part experienced by minority ethnic apprentices, generally
  - o Barriers to taking part specific to X ethnicity apprentices
- There are also differences in young people completing their programmes between minority ethnic and white apprentices. Reflections on this disparity
  - o Barriers to completion experienced by minority ethnic people, generally
  - o Barriers to completion experienced by X ethnicity, specifically
- Lastly, the data shows disparities in who passes their end-point assessment between minority ethnic and white apprentices. Reflections on this disparity
  - o Barriers to passing end-point assessments experienced by minority ethnic apprentices, generally
  - o Barriers to passing end-point assessments experienced by X ethnicity apprentices, specifically

Reflections and suggestions (5 minutes)

- Suggestions for making apprenticeships more inclusive to young people from X group
  - o Who should be responsible for actioning these, e.g., schools, government, employers, young people

[Researcher: say that participants are welcome to leave comments in the chat after the call ends – particularly if running out of time. Comments in the chat will be read and considered as part of the analyses. Remind young people to be polite and respectful in the chat]

Closing the discussion (5 minutes)

Any final comments

Thank for participation

Remind them that everything they say will be confidential and anonymous

Remind them not to share information about other people in the group

Remind them of their right to withdraw from the research

Incentives and leaflets – confirm process

Appendix E: Privacy notice for employers, training providers and stakeholders

The [National Centre for Social Research](#) (NatCen) has been commissioned by the Youth Futures Foundation to conduct qualitative research to develop a stronger understanding of young people from minority ethnic groups' experiences of apprenticeships.

In line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), we need to let you know how your information will be processed for this study. In this privacy notice, we explain:

- the legal basis for data processing;
- who will have access to your personal data;
- how your data will be used, stored and deleted;
- what your rights are according to UK GDPR, and
- who you can contact with a query or a complaint.

Who's who?

Youth Futures Foundation have funded NatCen to carry out qualitative research to understand young people from minority ethnic groups' experiences of apprenticeships.

You can find out more about these organisations using the following links:

Youth Futures Foundation: https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/

The National Centre for Social Research: https://www.natcen.ac.uk/

What is the legal basis for processing data?

NatCen are the data controller for this project. This means that we are responsible for deciding the purpose and legal basis for processing data. In order for the use of personal data to be lawful, we need to meet one (or more) conditions in the data protection legislation, as set out in Article 6(1) of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

Our legal basis for processing the data is 'legitimate interest'. This means that we believe that there is a genuine reason for us to process this data (to understand young people from minority ethnic groups' experiences of

apprenticeships), that this data is needed to fulfil this purpose (we could not conduct this research without this information), and that using this data will not interfere with individuals' interests, rights or freedoms.

You can contact NatCen with any questions about the processing of data at edap@natcen.ac.uk.

You can read more about NatCen's general privacy policy here: https://natcen.ac.uk/privacy-policy.

Who will have access to personal data?

Named individuals in the NatCen research team will have access to recordings and transcripts of interviews with academic experts, voluntary community sector representatives, training providers, employers, and young people. All interviews and focus groups will be carried out for the purpose of this study with individuals' consent. The NatCen research team will conduct interviews with all participants. All interview transcripts and responses will be anonymised before being analysed.

McGowan Transcriptions (www.mcgowantranscriptions.co.uk) is the transcription service NatCen uses to transcribe interview data. We will securely transfer audio-recordings to McGowan. They will have access to recordings and transcriptions from all interviews. McGowan is on NatCen's approved suppliers list and is compliant with all of our information security policies.

How will the data be used?

The data collected will be used for research purposes only. Information gathered from interviews and focus groups will be used to answer research questions about the experiences of young people from minority ethnic groups' experiences of apprenticeships.

During the study, NatCen will store and manage all data securely and confidentially. Only named individuals in the research team, along with our third-party transcription service provider, will have access to the data.

At the end of the study, in October 2024, NatCen will write a report summarising the research findings. The report will not identify any individuals who took part, unless we have explicit permission to do so. All personal information, and any other data held, will be securely deleted one year after the study is completed (i.e., October 2025).

Do I have the right to withdraw permission?
You have the right to withdraw your permission for data processing at any time and you do not have to justify or explain why you are doing so. To withdraw your permission, please contact the study team at edap@natcen.ac.uk.

If you withdraw your permission, we will stop processing your data. For any data that you have provided up to that point, we will remove the original data. If the data has already been aggregated with other responses as part of our analyses for the final report, we will not be able to disaggregate your data. However, you would not be identifiable in the aggregated results.

Who can I contact with a query or a complaint?
If you have any questions about how your personal information will be processed as part of this study, please contact the NatCen research team at edap@natcen.ac.uk or on 0808 168 2153.

If you have any concerns about how your data is used, you can contact NatCen's Data Protection Officer at dpo@natcen.ac.uk.

Under UK GDPR, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office. Please go to www.ico.gov.uk for more information.

Appendix F: Privacy notice for young people

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) has been commissioned by the Youth Futures Foundation to conduct qualitative research to develop a stronger understanding of young people from minority ethnic groups' experiences of apprenticeships.

In line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), we need to let you know how your information will be processed for this study. In this privacy notice, we explain:

- the legal basis for data processing;
- who will have access to your personal data;
- how your data will be used, stored and deleted;
- what your rights are according to UK GDPR, and
- who you can contact with a query or a complaint.

Who's who?

Youth Futures Foundation have funded NatCen to carry out qualitative research to understand young people from minority ethnic groups' experiences of apprenticeships.

You can find out more about these organisations using the following links: Youth Futures Foundation: https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/

The National Centre for Social Research: https://www.natcen.ac.uk/

What is the legal basis for processing data?

NatCen are the data controller for this project. This means that we are responsible for deciding the purpose and legal basis for processing data. In order for the use of personal data to be lawful, we need to meet one (or more) conditions in the data protection legislation, as set out in Article 6(1) of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

Our legal basis for processing the data is 'legitimate interest'. This means that we believe that there is a genuine reason for us to process this data (to understand young people from minority ethnic groups' experiences of apprenticeships), that this data is needed to fulfil this purpose (we could not

conduct this research without this information), and that using this data will not interfere with individuals' interests, rights or freedoms.

For the focus groups with young people, the recruitment agency Criteria will also collect information about ethnicity. This is called special category data. Only researchers at NatCen will have access to the special category data that you give to us. We will not share this information with anyone else.

Our legal basis for processing special category data is 'substantial public interest' under the sub-category of 'equality of opportunity or treatment.' This means that we believe that this data will contribute to the public interest and this data is necessary to identify or review the existence or absence of equality of opportunity or treatment between groups of and to enable such equality to be promoted or maintained.

You can contact NatCen with any questions about the processing of data at edap@natcen.ac.uk.

You can read more about NatCen's general privacy policy here: https://natcen.ac.uk/privacy-policy.

Who will have access to personal data?
Named individuals in the NatCen research team will have access to recordings and transcripts of focus groups. All focus groups will be carried out by the research team with individuals' consent. All interview transcripts and responses will be anonymised before being analysed.

Criteria will collect participants' contact details as well as ethnicity information in order to facilitate focus group recruitment and sampling. They will secure share this information with NatCen.

McGowan Transcriptions is the transcription service NatCen uses to transcribe interview and focus group data. We will securely transfer audio-recordings to McGowan. They will have access to recordings and transcriptions from all interviews. McGowan is on NatCen's approved suppliers list and is compliant with all of our information security policies.

How will the data be used?

The data collected will be used for research purposes only. Information gathered from focus groups will be used to answer research questions about the experiences of young people from minority ethnic groups' experiences of apprenticeships.

During the study, NatCen will store and manage all data securely and confidentially. Only named individuals in the research team, along with our third-party transcription service provider and the fieldwork recruitment agency, will have access to the data.

At the end of the study, in October 2024, NatCen will write a report summarising the research findings. The report will not identify any individuals who took part, unless we have explicit permission to do so. All personal information, and any other data held, will be securely deleted one year after the study is completed (i.e., October 2025).

Do I have the right to withdraw permission?

You have the right to withdraw your permission for data processing at any time and you do not have to justify or explain why you are doing so. To withdraw your permission, please contact the study team at edap@natcen.ac.uk.

If you withdraw your permission, we will stop processing your data. For any data that you have provided up to that point, we will remove the original data. If the data has already been aggregated with other responses as part of our analyses for the final report, we will not be able to disaggregate your data. However, you would not be identifiable in the aggregated results.

Who can I contact with a query or a complaint?

If you have any questions about how your personal information will be processed as part of this study, please contact the NatCen research team at edap@natcen.ac.uk or on 0808 168 2153.

If you have any concerns about how your data is used, you can contact NatCen's Data Protection Officer at dpo@natcen.ac.uk.

Under UK GDPR, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office. Please go to www.ico.gov.uk for more information.